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*The life of st. John Baptist de Rossi,  
tr. from the Ital. [of E. Mougeot] ...*

E. Mougeot, Giovanni Battista de Rossi







THE LIFE  
OF  
ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE ROSSI.

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**THE LIFE OF DOM BARTHOLOMEW OF  
THE MARTYRS**, Religious of the Order of St. Dominic,  
Archbishop of Braga, in Portugal. Translated from his Biogra-  
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—FROM THE BISHOP OF SALFORD.







## St. John Baptist de Rossi.

*This Photograph is taken from the Original Picture at the Trinità  
dei Pellegrini.*

THE LIFE  
OF  
ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE ROSSI.

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN,

BY LADY HERBERT.

INTRODUCTION:

*On Ecclesiastical Training and the Sacerdotal Life.*

BY THE BISHOP OF SALFORD.

LONDON:  
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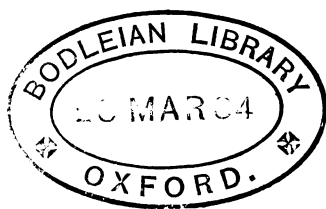
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DEDICATION OF THE TRANSLATOR.



THE ENGLISH VERSION OF THIS  
LIFE,  
UNDERTAKEN AT THE REQUEST OF ONE OF THE ENGLISH  
BISHOPS,  
IS DEDICATED WITH GREAT RESPECT  
TO THE  
*Secular Clergy.*



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*ERRATA.*—For “Dom” throughout the book read “Don.”

## INTRODUCTION.

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### On Ecclesiastical Training and the Sacerdotal Life.

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THE Life of ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE ROSSI has an altogether peculiar and singular interest. He is the first simple secular priest of modern times who has been canonized as a Confessor. There have been, among the secular clergy, bishops who have been canonized, such as St. Charles Borromeo, St. Francis of Sales, and St. Turibius, to speak only of the last three centuries. There have been secular priests canonized as Martyrs, such as the Parish Priests at Gorcum ; and there have been innumerable secular priests who have given their lives for the Faith, but have not yet been canonized, such as the martyrs of the English secular clergy, and the secular priests, of our own day, who suffered in Corea and China. But ST. JOHN BAPTIST is the first instance in modern times of the canonization as Confessor of a priest belonging to no religious order or congregation. He was a simple, humble member of the diocesan and pastoral clergy of the city of Rome.

If it be asked, how it has happened that so few secular

priests have been canonized, several reasons may be given. The first, that many who began as secular priests became either bishops or founders of religious orders and congregations. Thus St. John of Matha, St. Dominic, St. Cajetan, St. Philip Neri, St. Camillus de Lellis, St. Vincent of Paul, St. Joseph Calasanz, St. Alphonsus, and others, received their inspiration to draw up a stricter rule of life, or to found an Institute for the purpose of achieving some particular end or good work, while they were members of the secular clergy.

Another reason which may account for so small a number of canonized saints among the secular clergy is, that the lives of the secular clergy, as a rule, are much more isolated than those of the members of religious orders. They are less observed, and less the property of their brethren, than the lives that form part of a religious community. In a religious order everything that is remarkable is chronicled and treasured up; the lives of its heroes are written with every care; and there is a large and undying body of men interested,—and very justly interested,—in upholding the splendid examples which their holy brethren have given to the world. This fact is strikingly illustrated in the pathetic and edifying volumes of *Records of the Society of Jesus in England*, which have been published of late years. No such records could be produced of the lives of the secular clergy; for the simple reason that the secular clergy have never had the custom of drawing up a chronicle of the lives of their brethren. Secular and regular missionaries lived side by side in the same country, were equally pursued, hunted and persecuted, preached the same faith, showed the same charity,

endured the same trials, and died the same deaths. The minute history of the latter has been happily preserved; the history of the former, unless some special notoriety attached to their lives, is confined to the chronicles of heaven.

In addition to this, the very process of a canonization is difficult and expensive. It is carried through many generations, sometimes through a century or two. The promotion of a cause is taken up more easily by a compact body, having widespread relations, than by isolated members of the secular clergy. As to its cost, it is related that while the Gonzaga family rejoiced in having one of their house raised to the dignity of the altar, they used playfully to say that the canonization of a second would be the ruin of the family. The ordinary course of God's providence is to act through human means in promoting even the canonization of His saints. Had not the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster taken up the cause of the English Martyrs, who can say how long it might have been allowed to lie in abeyance? This, however, is not to ignore the direct action of God in giving the testimony of miracles, without which the Church never proceeds to a canonization.

But apart from the foregoing circumstances, it stands to reason that Religious Orders will always give to the Church the greater number of canonized saints. They possess, in addition to the obligations of the priesthood, definite obligations to practise for life the three great counsels of perfection; and they ordinarily have the inestimable advantage of a carefully prolonged training, and the support and encouragement of a multitude of brethren

who are like-minded. Still, it is fair to remark that we cannot judge of the excellence of states of life and of orders simply by the number of their canonized saints. The Carthusians, who belong to the highest state of contemplatives, have but few canonized saints; this arising, probably, from their lives being hidden and unobserved, and from their known unwillingness to admit the distraction incidental even to the promotion of causes for canonization. Their founder, St. Bruno, was canonized five centuries after his death; the three other canonized Carthusians were Bishops. Again, we find that the great Benedictine Order, divided as it is into such a variety of ramifications, has not given to the Church a canonized saint for five centuries; but no one will suppose that their rule does not lead to perfection. In like manner, the excellence and holiness of the state of the priesthood, in the secular clergy, is not to be judged by the number of secular priests that have been canonized. Finally, extraordinary sanctity is an extraordinary gift of God, who is pleased to exhibit it, now in the person of an apostle, like St. Peter; now in the founder of an order, like St. Francis; now in a bishop, like St. Charles; now in a shepherdess, like St. Germaine Cousin; now in a beggar, like St. Benedict Labre; and now in a secular priest, like the Saint whose Life has suggested this preface. *Mirabilis Deus in sanctis suis.*

2. In approaching a consideration of the Life of St. JOHN BAPTIST DE ROSSI, we naturally ask, the better to understand his mission to the world, to what category of saints does he belong? Is he of those whose lives are chiefly for our admiration, or of those whose lives are for

our imitation? The Holy Ghost sets before the eyes of the children of the Church examples of both kinds. There are lives in which the supernatural stands out so vividly, and in such extraordinary manifestation, that we seem to have before us beings of an order altogether different from our own,—contemplation so rapt, intense, and continuous, that it appears to be angelic rather than human;—mortification far exceeding the ordinary powers of man to endure; an empire over the forces of nature, with an independence of her ordinary laws, which astonishes and bewilders the beholder; knowledge too, and love, in which the supernatural is perpetually breaking forth like fire in strange revelations and unheard-of acts of charity. Many of the saints of the desert, St. Mary of Egypt, St. Simon Stylites, St. Peter of Alcantara, St. Veronica Giuliani, St. Joseph of Cupertino, and many others, are instances in point. It would be rash to say that such saints as these are less useful to the faithful because their lives are beyond their imitation. Our minds and hearts need lifting up above this natural world. Many of us are apt to be dangerously practical, and to lose sight altogether of the fact that while still on earth we belong to a supernatural order, and that the supernatural and natural ought to be as closely united in the life of a true Christian as the soul is united to the body. On this account it is that the Holy Ghost has raised up men and women in the Church, who, if we examine their lives, force upon our attention the existence and action of the supernatural. Then God glorifies His own infinite perfections, and rallies and instructs His children by singling out men and women, whom He makes, as it were, the embodiment of particular



virtues, like St. Peter of Alcantara, who may be called the personification of prayer and penance. Such examples strike and awaken us from our lethargic earthly routine, and summon us to the practice of a higher virtue. Less extraordinary examples of virtue would fail to teach us the lesson we need. Nor may we suppose that these saints, raised so high above us in their lives on earth that they seem to have nothing in common with us, are in reality less interested in our well-being than saints who are less extraordinary. The tenderness and depth of their charity correspond to their wonderful endowments of grace. Thus St. Teresa used to say of St. Peter of Alcantara, whose life of penance distanced that of all other saints, that he was never known to be prayed to after his death without granting the prayer of his petitioner.

The other reason for which saints are canonized is in order that we may have models, in our own flesh and blood, of our own country, and in our own state of life, to imitate. As some saints are set before us chiefly to raise our minds to the highest standard of virtue, and to awaken our admiration, so others are set before us particularly for our imitation. The founders of religious orders are naturally in this category, and so are great apostles and missionaries, like St. Bernardine of Siena, St. Vincent Ferrer, St. Francis Xavier, St. Francis Solano, St. Francis Girolamo, and others; and great bishops, like St. Charles Borromeo, St. Thomas of Villanova, and St. Francis of Sales.

Now we possess what we have hitherto been without: we have a simple secular priest, who was neither a bishop, nor the founder of a congregation, nor a member of a

religious order, nor even a foreign missionary. He was a simple priest, engaged in the humblest offices of the sacred ministry, devoted to the poor—to the most neglected among the poor,—and to the greatest sinners. His days were employed in prayer, in preaching, in visiting the sick, in teaching the ignorant, and in the confessional. Here in the confessional were achieved his greatest triumphs. He was no fashionable director, run after by rich ladies; no marvellous preacher, drawing after him the polished and educated by the fame of his learning and eloquence. He was just such a priest as hundreds of secular priests are called to be in this country. If you want to read of the sensational, of the extraordinary; if you want to see a meteor passing through the sky; if it is admiration alone that has to be excited, you must not turn to the Life of St. JOHN BAPTIST DE ROSSI. But if you want a perfect model for a secular priest, working in any of our large towns, or among our rural populations, you have him here in St. JOHN BAPTIST. His life was passed among the poor in town and country; and this in the midst of our modern civilization, for he died less than a hundred and twenty years ago.

3. The canonization of this secular priest is not merely a happy accident. It has taken place in God's chosen time, when the eyes of popes and bishops seem to be especially turned upon the necessity of raising the character of the secular clergy, for sanctity as well as for learning. The present condition of the world demands that a particular care should be bestowed upon the formation of the secular clergy, who form what may be called the ordinary pastoral clergy, the rank and file of the sacer-

dotal army of the Church. We may be permitted to dwell in some little detail upon this subject, arising, as it does, out of the providence of God, in raising St. JOHN BAPTIST to our altars at this particular time, in the midst of the present need of the Church.

It is no reproach to the regular orders to say that it has been disastrous to the Church where all the offices of influence and power, where all the education and direction of the people have been placed in their hands, and where at the same time the secular clergy have been neglected in their education, and excluded from posts of trust, and from the normal work of the Church in the midst of society. This happened in Portugal, and in parts of South America; to a great extent in Spain; and perhaps England herself may furnish a similar illustration of this in her condition at the rise of the sixteenth century. When the world persecutes the Church, it falls first upon the regular orders. Their influence, their good works, and sometimes the wealth which they accumulate, excite jealousy and envy. They are not of the soil in the same sense that the diocesan clergy are, who are bound to remain on it by the condition of their state, as much as the regular clergy are bound by their rule at the voice of obedience to depart to any part of the world. The secular or diocesan clergy are indigenous, and nearly always remain in the country; and it has been disastrous for religion to the last degree where their education has been neglected, and the avenue to all the influential branches of the ministry has been closed to them, because there were zealous bodies of regular clergy upon whom the bishops could cast all the chief work of the Church, and thereby save themselves the

labour, the expense, and the anxiety of forming an efficient diocesan clergy. The disaster has come, and come with double weight when, through persecution, the regulars have had to fly, as has happened, alas! so often during the last three hundred years, abandoning everything to a depressed clergy. No disaster can be greater than that a people be left in the hands of an untrained and neglected priesthood, whom the flock can neither confide in, nor honour and respect as they should.

It is not that we would have the regular clergy one whit less carefully trained, or less efficient than they are. Let them ascend from virtue to virtue; let their sanctity and learning shine forth more and more brightly in humility and charity. They are, as Pope Leo XIII. has said, "the auxiliary troops, specially necessary in our times, whose zeal and activity afford the bishops assistance, equally seasonable and valuable, as well in the exercise of the sacred ministry as in the accomplishment of works of charity." They raise the standard of holiness in the Church, and offer safe retreats and homes for the practice of the evangelical counsels of perfection. "Wherever the liberty of the Catholic Church exists, religious orders rise and form themselves spontaneously, like so many branches connected with the trunk of the Church whence they derive their origin."\*

Our consideration here is not of the perfection and office of the religious state, but of the needs of the diocesan priesthood, in connection with the life of St. JOHN BAPTIST DE ROSSI. And we affirm that the experience of the Church and common observation point out the necessity of a

\* Apostolic Letter to the Archbishop of Paris. 22nd Oct., 1880.

special, prolonged, and perhaps we may add extraordinary care in the preparation of priests, who are to live, for the most part, isolated lives in the world, scattered like grains of salt over society to preserve its spiritual life, and to arrest the principle of *décay*, which is ever ready to break out. In some true sense the secular priest stands in greater need of careful preparation than the members of religious orders. These latter, for the most part, live in communities, and are subject to a minute discipline which is continuous. Communities are necessarily confined to large centres of population, where they can find maintenance, or to foundations in the country, which are in some way or other sufficiently endowed.

But there is necessary work to be done in the Church, which is practically incompatible with community life. The pioneer's work of breaking new ground, of creating, out of the slenderest resources, new missions, new centres of spiritual life; the carrying spiritual light and food up and down among units scattered over a wide district, where a priest can barely find means of subsistence; the endless and wearisome labour of begging in order to save the little ones from perversion in heretical schools; the long years of monotonous work, Sunday after Sunday, month after month, with no change of scene or climate, perhaps during a whole lifetime. This is the character of much of the work that God confides to the secular and diocesan clergy. They are left as free as may be, because they have to fight singly, like sailors, rather than in compact bodies like soldiers. They possess a greater freedom, in order that they may render to God a greater service. And what is this phase of their

life but a repetition in the priest of the life of the Good Shepherd, who went out into the wilderness to seek and tend the sheep that was lost! No one but he who has had experience can tell the labours and self-sacrifice which spring out of love for souls, labours longer and harder than those which the shepherd Jacob went through when he served for Rachel "in the east country."

But these broad outlines are far from completing the picture of what the Church and the people require from the diocesan clergy. It is not sufficient that the priest should "pass muster," in knowledge and culture among the half-educated and the peasants of his congregation. We do not say that all priests must be what is popularly called learned and cultured men. There is abundant work for those who, possessing but moderate abilities and a mere sufficiency of knowledge, excel in piety and zeal. But what we urge is this; that in these days a more learned and cultured priesthood has become essential to the fulfilment of the Church's mission. Within three centuries the condition of society has been greatly changed. Increase of population and of leisure, the action of the press, and the spread of instruction among all classes, have reversed the ancient position of the clergy and laity in respect to knowledge. The clergy no longer lead, as they used to do, wherever they were found.

The torch of profane learning has been wrested from their hand, and is now carried throughout the world mainly by others. That this can be accounted for in a way that frees the Church from reproach is certain. The world's persecution of the Church—its wholesale confiscation, in every country, of that ecclesiastical property

which would have enabled the Church to produce a clergy numerous and leisured enough to pursue the path of knowledge, and even to push the pursuit of it further than it has yet been carried, accounts sufficiently for the change that has taken place. When the pursuit of knowledge, or the salvation of souls, have been set before the Church as a practical alternative, the Church has never hesitated to embrace the mission for which she was immediately instituted. Rather than see her children perish, she has sent forth her priests only partially equipped, at the earliest moment she could trust them to go.

A policy of such self-sacrifice is justifiable in an emergency, but it would be fatal if pursued systematically, and beyond the absolute need of the moment. Our clear duty is to make provision for a learned and cultured clergy.

A priest is not expected to be an expert in all the profane sciences. But he is expected to be abreast of the general knowledge and culture of the day. The people read history, science and literature; their difficulties against faith arise out of their reading. They have a right to look to their pastors for guidance, and for a knowledge of the connection between science and revealed religion. They have a right to expect of them at least an intelligent appreciation of their difficulties; and when religion is attacked to see the priest in the front rank of its defence. The priest is not a mere machine for administering sacraments, he has a mission to address himself to the people of the age in which he lives. He must speak to their intellect, as well as to their conscience; he must

understand the former, if he is to regulate the latter. He has to do with the whole man.

4. It is manifest that if the clergy are to become more learned and cultured than they are, a longer time must be bestowed upon their education than is given at present. While a notable increase of time has been given during the last centuries to the education of the laity, by no corresponding increase of time has the ecclesiastical course been prolonged.

It may be permissible here to throw out some suggestions for the improvement of ecclesiastical education, and to consider, in the first place, its intellectual side, and then the spiritual and religious formation of the clergy.

So early as the sixteenth century, the need of a College of Higher Studies for the English clergy was keenly felt. Although Cardinal Allen founded a College at Douai, in which the full ordinary course of instruction was given to the missionaries who were sent to death in England, it was even then felt that this was not enough. Allen's mind was full of a project for establishing a College of Higher Studies. He regarded it as essential, in order to cope with the new learning in England. He was thwarted in his project, and did not live to realize it. But the wisdom and foresight of Allen have been justified by experience. We are still asking for that which Allen deemed necessary three hundred years ago.

But till a House of Higher Studies can be founded, much might be done with the means already at our disposal. Proficiency will not come of multiplying theological seminaries, but rather by increasing the number of their



students, raising the standard of their studies, and prolonging their years of culture and training.

In the absence of a Catholic University, or of a House of Higher Studies, the various seminaries in the country might unite in common examinations, to be followed by a suitable recognition of merit and by degrees. This is no new idea. But a few years ago the Bishop of Perugia, who is now Pope Leo XIII., proposed a scheme of this kind to the seminaries of Umbria. If it was not at once adopted, it was because an element of human infirmity and local difficulties prevailed over a suggestion fraught with wisdom.

But in addition to raising the standard of the ordinary course, some special provision seems needed to supplement it, by which young men of higher intellectual gifts might continue to pursue their studies, in either literature, science, history, sacred scripture, philosophy, or theology, for a few years beyond the ordinary course. In the early and middle ages, when the means of communication were far different to what they are now, young men were sent to distant seats of learning, wherever a specific advantage was to be found that could not be gained at home. It would seem that in those days greater sacrifices were made by the clergy to obtain learning and intellectual excellence than are habitually made at present; whereas the need of such excellence has certainly not diminished.

5. Another consideration, closely connected with the intellectual power of the clergy, will not be out of place. A man may be a walking encyclopædia of knowledge, a very Solomon of wisdom; but if he cannot communicate

his knowledge, if he cannot use his power, of what service will he be to his neighbour and to the Church?

What has given to the modern apostles of science their prestige, their empire over the minds of their fellow-countrymen? Not merely their knowledge, and their discoveries of the secrets of nature; but the facility, the grace, the transparency of language, with which they have presented their theories and discoveries to the world. Would the influence of Messrs. Rénan, Darwin, Tyndal, and Huxley have been what they are had they written and spoken in a style that was involved, cumbersome and unpolished? In the midst of the *cacoethes scribendi*, and of the multitude of public speakers, at least the law of the survival of the fittest should point out to us the necessity of cultivating the knowledge and use of our mother tongue. It is through this alone that we can address, captivate, and persuade our fellow-men. Men will read and listen to that which pleases them. While the variety of choice is so great they will be drawn to whatever needs the least expenditure of unnecessary labour. They will certainly consult their ease as well as their taste. We have only to ask ourselves, What is it that draws men to a lecture, to the perusal of a periodical or a book? Not alone the matter, but the style. What is it that wearies a congregation? What is it that thins the benches? Not the truths that are announced from the pulpit, but the faulty, confused, uncultured language in which they are delivered.

While the whole world is being moved by the press as never before; while every effort is made to bring men and women up with a taste, aye, even with a passion for

reading, and when literature is destined to become part of their daily food; while, again, debating clubs are established in every large town, in order to cultivate the art of public speaking in those who hold the franchise,—how is it possible that the Catholic clergy, who are nothing if they are not the guides and instructors of the people, should be satisfied to enter upon life with no preparation for public speaking, or with nothing that is worthy of being called preparation? We know what assiduous care great political speakers and leaders of public thought have bestowed upon their remote and immediate preparation. A hundred examples come to mind at once, such as those of the elder and the younger Pitt, of Fox, Sheridan, Sheil, and Macaulay, not to mention the names of living orators. They all remembered and acted upon that most ancient of maxims, *orator fit*; they made a critical study of their mother tongue; they enriched their memories with words and idioms; they never ceased, by reading and exercise, to form, strengthen, and enrich all the powers which render public speaking effective. Yet how often it happens that in the education of the clergy the art of public speaking is left to chance. The chief weapon of the priest, the *gladium linguæ*, is neither tempered, nor sharpened and burnished, as true steel always should be. It is a mistake to suppose that a sufficient knowledge and use of the English tongue can be picked up incidentally during the ordinary course of studies. The masters of language never thought this. Nor can it be acquired during the two years given to what is called the classes of poetry and rhetoric, while the mind is still young and the judgment immature.

Long before the development and spread of modern knowledge, it was laid down as a rule by the two most intellectual religious orders in the Church, that after the ordinary course of studies had been completed their students were to bestow a second year upon the literature and the use of the language they were to preach in. Would it not, then, amply repay the Church in this country to prolong the usual course of ecclesiastical studies by a year, which should be chiefly devoted to the study of English, and to the vernacular use of the professional knowledge that had been already acquired?

The habit of requiring boys in the lower classes to narrate aloud in their own words the facts of history they learn, and the judgments and opinions suggested by them, and to explain in a continuous narrative the doctrines of their catechism,—the formation of debating societies, and the cultivation of a healthy public opinion in schools as to the importance of the study of the English classics, both for writing and public speaking, would easily lead up to the more radical change proposed, if it did not even dispense with the necessity of devoting a year at the close of the entire course to what may be called an advanced study of rhetoric.

Until the study and cultivated use of the English language engages more of the attention of our schools and seminaries than it has hitherto done, it will be vain to expect the Catholic clergy to exercise that power over the minds of the people which is within their reach. Let not the words of the apostle be adduced as an objection: "*Sermo meus et prædicatio mea non in persuasibilibus humanæ scientiæ, sed in ostensione spiritus et virtutis.*"

(1 Cor. ii. 4.) The apostle meant that the preaching of the Gospel must stand, not on a mere human foundation, but upon the grace and power of God. His aim was not that of the vain-glorious Corinthian orators and philosophers, who sought to tickle the ears of men, to display vain learning, and to win applause. St. Paul knew and preached nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. All human knowledge, all eloquence, all power, were so buried by the Apostle, in subservience to the knowledge and service of Jesus Christ, that he accounted them as nothing. This was not to condemn or forbid the use of knowledge, eloquence, and intellectual power,—the apostle possessed and used them abundantly,—but to declare their secondary and subordinate place, basing his reliance on the power and grace of God.

“Docente te in Ecclesia,” writes St. Jerome in his epistle to Nepotian, “non clamor populi, sed gemitus suscitetur. Lacrymæ auditorum, laudes tuæ sint. Sermo Presbyteri Scripturarum lectione conditus sit. Nolo te declamatorem esse et rabulam garrulumque sine ratione, sed mysteriorum peritum, et sacramentorum Dei tui eruditissimum. Verba volvere, et celeritate dicendi apud imperitum vulgus admirationem sui facere, indoctorum hominum est.”

God knows it is not the “*rabulam garrulum*” style of eloquence—“*sine ratione*”—that we commend, any more than it is the halting, ungrammatical, involved, and unintelligible style, which is quite as often “*sine ratione*,” and is the result of ignorance of the language, of neglect of early training in the use of it, or of a presumptuous and foolish belief in the theory of a “*dabitur vobis.*” A

preacher who is a real master of speech will use a transparent simplicity and a familiar illustration in preaching to the uneducated which will go straight home to their minds and hearts, while in preaching to the educated he will use language adapted to the audience, and becoming the occasion.

6. St. Paul would have the ministers of the Gospel make all their studies subservient to the preaching of Jesus Christ. Is it not possible to improve upon the system of intellectual discipline at present in use for ecclesiastical students, or must ecclesiastical training wholly conform to the fashion of the times? According to the present system, ecclesiastical students are now subjected to a long course of exclusively pagan classics. While fully admitting that the study of the ancient authors of Greece and Rome presents many intellectual advantages, there can be no doubt but that their standard of thought and judgment is pagan, that their morality, their aspirations, and their motives are pagan. The paganism in thought and conduct which characterises the nineteenth century is quite as much the result of the pagan classical renaissance as of the Protestantism of the sixteenth century. The passionate revival of pagan literature has ended by well-nigh wrecking the Italian peninsula, and its effects upon faith and morals are manifest throughout Europe.

We do not apprehend any direct injury to religion from the use made of the classics in our seminaries, nor do we suggest their total abolition. But they inflict indirectly a grievous injury upon the Church by monopolizing the attention of her ecclesiastical students for six or seven years to the entire exclusion of the study of the great

Christian authors. What we venture to suggest is, the introduction of the study of selections from the writings of the Greek and Latin Fathers, at least, side by side with the pagan classics.

For what purpose, it may be asked? In order to form the minds of the clergy from an early age upon the highest ecclesiastical authors, and thus help them to meet and counteract in some degree that terrible worldly pagan influence which is almost omnipresent, not merely in the pagan classics, but in the literature and thought of the day.

What a storehouse, too, of noble Christian thoughts and maxims; what sublime, yet practical and homely lessons; what fire of Christian zeal; what examples of apostolic rhetoric, might not a youth gather from the study of well-made selections from the Fathers! Then again, can any one,—not fanatically wedded to the modern superstition that some extraordinary latent virtue lurks in the study of pagan mythology, and in tracking out the references contained in pagan authors, to past or contemporaneous pagan facts and customs,—for a moment believe that the doctrines and references contained in the Christian Fathers are not infinitely more interesting and infinitely more important to a Christian scholar, let alone a Christian priest? Take selections from the writings of St. John Chrysostom, of St. Gregory Nazianzen, of St. Jerome, St. Augustine, St. Leo, St. Bernard, or of St. Prudentius, and from the Church hymns,—and will not each and all of them open out to the student studies of contemporaneous history, of the struggle between Christianity and paganism,

the manners, customs, and ways of thought which the Church had to combat or to convert, of the progress of the Church in the world during a period which the present dangerously resembles?

As long as we give seven precious years of youth to the assiduous, unflagging study of pagan authors, to the *entire exclusion* from our studies of the Christian classics, can we be surprised if the silent, unheeded conflux of the two streams—the ancient and the modern paganisms—should insensibly carry away many a youth from the noble mission for which he was destined in the Church of God? If the Church has entered upon a new phase in her relations to the world, it may surely be necessary to revise the methods of education which sprang up amidst the evils of the sixteenth century, and to turn to better account the years dedicated to the study of humanities, which form the remote preparation for the priesthood.

The study of the Fathers during the course of humanities would be productive of other results. It would infuse a taste for reading the Fathers, which seems at present to have been lost. And with what great benefit!—With what benefit to preachers, to confessors,—and hence to the people! With what benefit to the priest himself! For importance, authority, learning, and power, the Fathers stand alone in the Church. He who reads the Fathers, and has cultivation enough to digest and assimilate them, so far from finding that he has buried his mind, like a relic in a mass of antiquity, will find that he has come forth doubly armed—in armour that he can adjust to the times, and with weapons that he can wield with effect. *Non nova sed novè*. How few the priests now-a-



days familiar with the Fathers! They all know the estimate in which the Church holds their teaching; they know the authoritative place they take in theology; but they know little more than this, for the simple reason that during their three or four years' course of theology there was not the material time to read the Fathers, and during the six or seven years when they might have formed undying friendships with them, their whole time was given to Cicero, Virgil, and Horace, to Zenophon, Homer, and Greek plays.

Another result would spring naturally from the spread of such a taste. Modern ascetical books,—of which a multitude are but pale and insipid dilutions of piety, and feeders of weak popular tastes and devotions,—would become healthier, stronger, and more nourishing. There is a modern tendency on the part of many to strain after the last developments of doctrine or devotion, to the neglect of their root; to prize the filigree, and to ignore the solid substance of which it is the efflorescence and the ornament. In an age in which Christianity and Theism itself are at stake, we especially need the masculine sense and generous devotion to the great truths which abound in the writings of the Fathers. This is not to condemn the modern industries of piety, of which the Church has approved. It is to keep everything in due subordination, and to be wise unto sobriety.

7. It is not the purpose of this Introduction to enter upon an exhaustive disquisition on the various studies by which ecclesiastical education may be advantageously raised and prolonged. But one other observation in connection with the formation of a more learned clergy may

be made; and it is this—that unless leisure and opportunities for study be supplied after the conclusion of the ecclesiastical course, no great tradition and succession of intellectual power and learning will ever be established among the secular clergy. A priest thrown into the active practical work of the mission is unable to give himself to a life of study. His studies will have to be merely supplementary to his work. Other careers therefore than that of the mission ought to be at hand. An invaluable service might be rendered to the Church by the gradual foundation of benefices attached to canonries, having fixed conditions annexed to them, such as the delivery and publication of lectures upon given subjects, and by the endowment of Professorships.

The work of education in colleges,—which will no doubt increase in general importance,—offers another most suitable career for the development of intellectual tastes and the pursuit of learning. This is a reason why bishops ought to reserve to the diocesan clergy a fair proportion of such work in every diocese. To make over the whole of this field for apostolic zeal to religious bodies would be practically to confine the secular clergy to parochial work, to thin and impoverish their ranks, and finally to diminish their prestige and their influence on society, to the ultimate injury of the Church. There will always be educational work for those religious bodies that have been instituted for the education of youth, as well as for the secular clergy. It is in order that such work may be properly apportioned, that the Church has invested the bishop with certain powers of discretion as to the opening of houses of education within his diocese.

8. Let us now turn to the ascetical or spiritual side of ecclesiastical education. The Life of St. JOHN BAPTIST DE ROSSI will here furnish us with practical examples and illustrations.

Important as the intellectual training of the clergy is, their spiritual formation and discipline are of infinitely greater moment. Learning and culture are not the equivalents of zeal and piety. A priest who has acquired the latter, with a mere sufficiency of the former, is to be preferred for parochial work and the cure of souls to one who is richly endowed with learning, but is inferior in the virtues of zeal and piety. This is the wise teaching of St. Alphonsus, and there is no bishop who will not confirm its truth from his own experience.

In the spiritual training of youths for the priesthood, the first question to be asked is, What standard of life are they to be taught to aim at?

The Church in her solemn ordination service declares that priests are ordained "in adjutorium duodecim Apostolorum, Episcoporum, videlicet Catholicorum," and that consequently they ought to be perfect:—"fide et opere debere perfectos, seu geminæ dilectionis, Dei scilicet et proximi, virtute esse fundatos."

The standard of life to be aimed at, the model to be imitated, is set forth by St. Jerome in few and simple words, in his Letter to Paulinus on the Priesthood. "Episcopi et Presbyteri," he says, "*habeant in exemplum Apostolos et Apostolicos viros; quorum honorem possidentes habere nitantur et meritum.*"

And the Holy See, in the Letter published by the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda upon the missionary vow and

oath, as taken in this country, distinctly describes the state of those who take it as that of priests, “qui in arduum *apostolici ministerii opus assumuntur.*” There ought therefore to be no doubt whatever as to the standard of life to be aimed at. We need add no more in proof of this.

9. In order that ecclesiastical students may reach this high standard, the thoughts and efforts of superiors ought to be continually directed to awaken in their minds an earnest, intelligent, and continuous *desire* of the apostolic life. St. Augustine says: “*tota vita boni Christiani sanctum desiderium:*” much more must it be the active and working principle in the life of a priest. *Desire*, St. Thomas teaches with a philosophy which is profoundly true, enlarges the soul, and renders it capable of containing that which it desires to possess. Desire not only strengthens and enlarges the superior faculties of the soul, but overflowing the inferior, it enlists the co-operation of the emotions and even of the body itself. “*Cor meum et caro mea exultaverunt in Deum vivum.*” “*Dilata os tuum et adimplebo illud.*” St. Paul, forgetting the things that were behind, by earnest desire pressed forward to that which he had not yet attained. The priest, then, like the apostle, must be emphatically “a man of desires.” The *desire* to advance in sanctity, the *desire* to do great things for God’s glory, the *desire* to have “*partem aliquam et societatem cum tuis sanctis apostolis,*” as every priest in the holy Mass prays that he may have, takes the place in the spiritual life of that well-regulated ambition which we know to be essential for success in the affairs of this world. The lawyer, the merchant, the physician, the politician, who is not actively

inspired by an earnest desire to advance in his profession, is doomed from the beginning to failure. The ecclesiastical student who has not placed the true standard of perfection before his mind, and is not continually animated by a *desire* to attain it, is also from the outset doomed to a life of miserable mediocrity, if to nothing lower still. Indeed, it is true to say that where there is no *desire* of perfection, there is no divine vocation to the priesthood. But if at present you feel no burning desire within you, be not discouraged; in the words of the Venerable Cardinal Bona, "Saltem desidera id multum desiderare."

10. Nothing conduces more readily or more forcibly to awaken and nourish these holy desires in the soul, than a constant intercourse and familiarity with the Saints. St. JOHN BAPTIST DE ROSSI used to insist very much on this, and on his death-bed he had the Lives of the Saints, especially that of St. Philip Neri, read to him, and he preferred that kind of reading to any sort of exhortation or conversation. Nor is it surprising that the Lives of the Saints should act so powerfully on the soul. They are, as St. JOHN BAPTIST used to say, "the supplement to the Gospel," "the maxims of Jesus Christ reduced to practice." They are the heroes, the only true heroes, of our race. They alone had formed the correct estimate of God and of the world; and their lives were consistent with their estimate.

St. JOHN BAPTIST constantly seasoned and illustrated his sermons and instructions with examples from the Lives of the Saints, well knowing that the mind and heart are drawn to virtue by witnessing its effects upon others. A penitent's good resolution is often sealed

by the quotation of an example from the Life of a Saint. How many generous and heroic deeds, how many a consecration of life itself to God's service, have followed, as cause and effect, the reading of the Life of a Saint!

There is particularly one class of priests to whom the Lives of the Saints may become a great solace;—those who live alone on small missions, or with scattered congregations. They need a companionship and friendship which they cannot, and perhaps should not, seek among their flock. But, through an intimate acquaintance with the Lives of Saints, they may hold a very sweet and profitable intercourse with the great servants of God, who lovingly look down upon us from their thrones above. This is one of the unspeakable consolations to be drawn out of the doctrine of the Communion of Saints. We can at pleasure place ourselves in direct communication with Saints. We have it in our own power, by means of reading, to become acquainted with them. Acquaintance begets love, and love a return of love. They speak to us in their biographies, and we speak to them in our prayers. They hear us, love us, help us. O, how many secret sources of happiness and of grace are to be found in the writings of the Fathers and the Lives of the Saints, if only superiors would train their subjects from an early age to turn their whole soul in this direction!

11. ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE ROSSI's vocation and sanctity seem to have been wonderfully promoted by his joining the congregation or *Sodality of the twelve Apostles*, which was formed in his time in the Roman College.

A prejudice exists in some minds against the existence of sodalities in Colleges, where all the students are supposed

to be on an equality. They are said to produce a "hot house piety," which will not stand the outer air, and to create differences where all are equal. To this we reply, that a large college, especially if it be composed of lay and church students, is made up of every variety of character, with at least as wide an interval between the highest and lowest capabilities of holiness, as between the highest and lowest degrees of natural ability.

The college rule offers just such spiritual advantages as are suitable to all; but the sodality is a voluntary association designed to afford additional spiritual benefits to those who desire them. Differences are recognised, and the law of liberty is respected. Nor need there be any danger of the growth of a spurious piety which will not wear. It is the business of a wise superior or director to check the growth of youthful, morbid exaggerations, and to guard against that deceptive and dissiduous piety, which has roots, if it have any roots, only in the imagination and emotions.

If a college is a little inner world, and a preparation for the outer one, why should it not have its own associations like the outside world? The world is full of societies for the better attainment of various ends,—commercial, scientific, social and political. Every parish, too, has its confraternities, with its rules and badges: why, then, may not a college, composed of youths of varied characters and different vocations, have its sodality, for the purpose, for instance, of cultivating a deeper knowledge of spiritual works, and especially of the Lives of the Saints, and for the promotion and development of the apostolic spirit?

ST. JOHN BAPTIST derived the greatest advantage from

the association formed in the Roman College; and he remained a member of it for twenty years. He also found that an association of secular priests, called "the Pious Union of Priests," was of sensible assistance to him when he entered upon his missionary work. There can be no doubt that, when priests are thoroughly in earnest about their own sanctification as well as about their work, the edification and mutual support derived from a voluntary association of brother priests is of wonderful advantage, at least to a great many. This has been found to be the case in Italy, Germany and France. In France at the present moment, there is a wide-spread society of secular priests, having a purely spiritual object, which has been blessed and recommended by Pius IX., and by Leo XIII. An association or brotherhood, in honour of St. Peter, the Head of the priesthood, has come into existence in England. We know not to what extent it may develop, or whether it will answer the need. But this assuredly is true, that an association of secular priests, formed simply to promote the apostolic spirit, into which the young clergy, who come forth in the first fervour of their ordination, might enter, would help to sustain good resolutions at a most critical period, and would in various ways be productive of many blessings.

Were it possible to prolong, as we have suggested, the seminary course, so as to ensure for the secular, as for the regular clergy, a greater spiritual as well as intellectual maturity, before they are thrown upon the world, the Church would be amply repaid in a very few years, for any sacrifice that she might have had to make for the purpose. But pending any such change, the creation of



voluntary associations of missionary priests for the promotion of the apostolic spirit, would certainly be according to the mind and heart of our great secular priest, ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE ROSSI.

12. ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE ROSSI ought to be particularly honoured and invoked by the secular clergy, because of the high esteem which he had for their state of life. He had no vocation to any religious order, but was a thorough secular priest. The religious state is to be profoundly respected, because it is a state tending, by the use of the most approved means, to perfection. No one can be said *sentire cum Ecclesia*, who is hostile or ill-disposed towards it; nay, he ought "laudare plurimum religionum status," as St. Ignatius teaches. All the saints who were not members of religious orders, were in relations of amity with one or other of them. ST. JOHN BAPTIST owed his early training and education to the Jesuits, who set him on the road towards heroic sanctity, and encouraged him in it. But he had his own high vocation, which he properly esteemed; he was a secular priest, devoted to the secular clergy. It was noticed how bright and happy he always was in the midst of his brethren of the clergy, and how well he was known to nearly all the clergy of Rome. A considerable part of his life was spent in giving them retreats and conferences, and he exercised a special apostolate among young secular priests just ordained. Pope Benedict XIV. esteemed his opinion so highly that he consulted him upon the measures best calculated to improve and raise the condition of the Roman clergy. Indeed, ST. JOHN BAPTIST, like so many others, seems to have acted all through life upon the conviction that one

of the ways in which God may be most glorified is by raising and perfecting the diocesan clergy. He often dissuaded young men from becoming religious, believing that they were being carried away by a momentary enthusiasm, rather than by a solid and definite vocation, and persuaded them to seek their sanctification and perfection in the ranks of the secular clergy. And his biographers point out that his discernment was justified by the important services which many of them rendered to religion as secular priests.

ST. JOHN BAPTIST had formed to himself a very high ideal of the perfection belonging to the priesthood. He had no notion that it was a state designed to furnish a mere easy and innocent mode of existence, in which the secular priest was to differ from an ordinary layman only in the matter of Orders. With St. John Chrysostom, he saw that the secular priest is like leaven "*hid* in the meal," "buried but not destroyed, till by little and little it transmutes the whole lump into its own condition." His whole aim was therefore to model his life on the example of the apostles, and to train himself to those virtues by means of which they leavened and converted the world.

It is not surprising therefore to hear that he was very jealous of his right to practise the great evangelical counsels, though he took no vows of religion; and that he made for himself a rule of life, based upon their observance, and upon the duties which Providence marked out for him.

13. Now first, as to evangelical poverty. There are various degrees in the practice of the counsel of voluntary

poverty, by means of which we become like Christ and the apostles.

The observance even of the vow of poverty is very differently interpreted in different orders. Some religious are allowed to possess a small limited amount; others are supplied with what they ask for; some are poor personally, but rich corporately; others are poor personally and corporately. Some are mendicants, like the Franciscans; and others, like the followers of the rule of that wonderful apostolic hero, St. Cajetan, can neither possess personally or corporately, nor even beg for alms as the mendicants do, but depend absolutely on Providence, taking only what is voluntarily offered them. St. Cajetan is said to have received this rule from the apostle St. Peter himself, who used often to appear to him; and he founded his order in the church of St. Peter, over the body of the great apostle.

As there are various degrees in the practice of poverty among the regular clergy, so much more may there be among the secular.

Voluntary poverty being a counsel, is not of obligation *in se*. But the state of life we voluntarily embrace may make it obligatory upon us to a greater or less extent; and our own free will, sustained by divine grace, may lead us to carry its practice to heroic lengths, even though we are not members of a religious order. But it is one of those virtues which is not to be inculcated by urging, driving, and legislation. It may be inspired by wise directors, by saints' lives, spiritual reading, and prayer. It is the natural result of the growth of love and generosity towards our Divine Redeemer, of love and generosity

founded on a very thoughtful reading of the Gospels:  
“*Intellectus cogitabundus principium omnis boni.*”

The whole of this question must be of practical interest to every young priest who, being about to enter upon his missionary career, thinks within himself by what rule he shall guide his life, and what shall be his conduct in respect to the goods of this world, which may come more or less into his possession. St. JOHN BAPTIST carefully considered the matter, and came to a definite resolution, which he kept most perfectly to the day of his death. A few detailed considerations may therefore be of use to those who are “men of desires,” who “hunger and thirst after justice,” and are seeking as far as possible for “the more excellent way.”

The words of the apostle, “*Scio et abundare et penuriam pati,*” offer to the priest a wise rule of conduct; “I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound, (everywhere and in all things I am instructed,) both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.” (Phil. iv. 12.) On these words St. John Chrysostom remarks, “Some one will say that it requires no great wisdom or virtue ‘to abound.’ But,” he answers, “there is great need of virtue to know how to abound, quite as much as to know how to endure poverty. As want inclines us to do many evil things, so also doth plenty. Many coming into plenty have become indolent, not knowing how to bear good fortune. Many have taken it as a reason for working no longer. But Paul did not so, for what he received he spent upon others, and emptied himself for them. This is to know how to make good use of what we have. He did not relax his life, nor exult

in abundance. Paul was the same in want and in plenty; he was neither depressed and dissatisfied when he was in want, nor was he set up and arrogant when he was in plenty. 'I know *how to abound and how to suffer need.*' And it is here that the apostle immediately adds, 'I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me.'"

The secular priest retains a liberty in respect to this counsel which the regular has surrendered. The one uses his liberty for God, the other sacrifices it for God. The glory of God should be the end of both, and God is honoured by each in a different way. But as the one requires rules and discipline for the maintenance of his vow, so does the other require rules and self-restraint lest he abuse his liberty. The young priest will therefore act with discretion if, like St. JOHN BAPTIST, he lay down for himself, under the sanction of his director, some rules and practices to be observed. These cannot be the same for all. The members of the secular clergy naturally differ in antecedents, character, and health; circumstances of time, place, and fitness vary. For instance, the severity in furniture and food, which would brace up one, might almost incapacitate another. That which might be self-indulgence in a third, might be absolutely needful to the cheerfulness and health of a fourth. But in determining such matters we are fortunately not left wholly to our own discretion. God Himself often comes in to correct our too partial judgment, by providentially ordering the circumstances of our life, and limiting, perhaps to the very borders of poverty, the means over which He gives us control.

Some degrees of evangelical poverty, which are com-

patible with the life of a missionary priest in England, may here be mentioned.

i. The cultivation of a special love for the poor, giving work for the poor a distinct preference over work for the rich. This was ST. JOHN BAPTIST's maxim all his life. The great work of the Catholic clergy in England must ever be among the poor; this is the Gospel principle, "evangelizare pauperibus." We shall convert the country by converting the people. The Establishment followed the opposite principle, in obedience to the world and the flesh, and it has lost the people. It will never be the "fine gentlemen" priests that will convert England, but priests steeped in the apostolic spirit, who find their rest after labour among the people, not in parties and in dining, but in prayer and reading.

ii. The next degree is a preference for poor and destitute missions, where there is much to suffer; or, at least, a cheerful willingness to serve them as long as the bishop may appoint, with an unalterable resolution never to repine, never to petition or scheme to be transferred to a mission where the emoluments are richer and the comforts greater.

Practically the diocesan clergy in England and other missionary lands form a great mendicant order. *Nolens volens* the secular priest must often be as poor as St. Francis. If he is poor by necessity, he will be wise to sanctify his poverty by making it voluntary through acts of the will. More wonderful than any Midas's wand is the act of the will which can convert the distress of earthly poverty into a heavenly treasure. Nothing assuredly is sadder than to see a priest fretting and repining at poverty,

treating as an unwelcome, miserable wretch her who has been offered to him, even as a spouse, by Jesus Christ. Let him once begin to look upon poverty as the apostles and St. JOHN BAPTIST did, and after a little time he will fall down upon his knees and bless God for a new sense of liberty and independence that has arisen within his soul, and for a train of innumerable blessings.

The words of St. Vincent Ferrer upon the practice of poverty are very consoling, and are worth quotation. He says: "A certain author observes, 'To be poor is a thing which in itself merits no praise, but what renders it meritorious is the fact of loving poverty, and of suffering with joy for Christ's sake whatever wants poverty entails on us.'

"Unhappily, there are many who glory only in the name of poverty, who embrace it merely on the condition that they shall want for nothing. They desire to pass for the friends of poverty, but strenuously shun its daily accompaniments, viz., hunger and thirst, contempt and humiliation. Such is not the example of Him who, being sovereignly rich, became poor for our sakes; such is not what we discover in the acts and instructions of the apostles.

"Ask nothing of any one, except when absolute necessity obliges you; neither accept the presents which people offer you, unless it be to distribute them among the poor. By acting thus, both they whose gifts you refuse, and they who hear of your disinterestedness, will be edified; thus will you the more easily lead them to despise the world and to relieve the poor."

This was the poverty that St. JOHN BAPTIST DE ROSSI practised, and he was a secular priest.

iii. An apostolical contempt for money distinguishes the priest of the sanctuary from the man of business in the world. The latter sets a money value upon his services, which belong to himself and his family. The priest sets no earthly price upon his. He consecrated them to God with the consecration of his life. The holy Bishop, Bartholomew of the Martyrs, quotes with strong commendation the words of one of the Fathers, who, in speaking of the priesthood, says: "*Clerici qui fideliter laborant in Ecclesia, non expectent hic stipendia temporalia ab Ecclesia, quasi præmia laborum (quia stipendia suæ militiæ non nisi cœlestia sunt), sed solum necessaria ad sustentationem vitæ.*"

Hence the priest, who is provided with the needful, when asked by the Bishop to render some service to the Church, does not bargain with the Church for the price of his labour, like a hireling; but works after the example of an apostle. If unhappily a priest have come into the Church, like a tradesman, for a living—his eye, like the eye of a tradesman, will be always on the till. If avarice have struck her root into his heart, it will become visible to others, in his impulses, in the readiness or slackness of his movements at certain times, and his inward calculations will be often betrayed by casual looks and words.

Although a priest may be bound to spend much time in collecting money, to claim the established dues, and to receive gifts,—and all this he must do for the sake of the people,—he ought always both to be, and to appear to be, personally detached from filthy lucre. When he is

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known to spend all that he receives upon religion and good works—not upon his own comforts and pleasures—he will be recognised as walking in the path of the apostles.

iv. A priest is not open to reproach if he lay by some provision for sickness and old age, especially where there is no common fund for that purpose; even the regular, when he vows poverty, knows that he will be provided for. But to provide for a time of illness and old age, out of the contributions and free gifts of the flock, is a very different thing to bequeathing the money thus collected to friends and relatives. It is a scandal to the faithful, and a lasting stain on the name of a priest, when money given in the service of God, or for the use of His anointed, is hoarded and finally left away from the Church, for the enjoyment of a private family.

But the priest who determines to make no earthly provision for the future, spending everything, as it comes, upon religion and the poor, practises poverty and trust in Providence in a heroic degree. St. JOHN BAPTIST did this, as may be seen in his life; and this is another degree in which a priest may, if he will, practise evangelical poverty.

v. But what of those priests who possess private fortune? Can they practise the counsel of evangelical poverty, and still retain the use of their fortune? Assuredly they can. Some priests consecrate to God, by a solemn act, all that they possess, even their private fortune, and bind themselves to hold it, either in the names of others or in their own, and to administer it, simply as a trust. They then no more allow themselves to spend it upon their own comforts and pleasures, than they would

spend upon these a deposit of trust money belonging to another. Would St. Charles have done better to have taken a religious vow of poverty, at the outset of life, than to have spent his large fortune year by year, as he did, upon education and charity, practising all the time towards himself the strictest poverty? Opinions may not be divided upon the question in the abstract. Each case must be considered in the concrete. Certain, however, it is, that if the secular priest use his private fortune like St. Charles, he will walk in the example of saints, and practise evangelical poverty in a heroic degree.

We may quote the authority of St. Charles Borromeo without suggesting a suspicion that we are drawing the secular clergy away from their own proper vocation, by setting forth his spirit and example as to poverty. St. Charles in one of his homilies addressed his priests thus:

“Do you know how great is the perfection of complete poverty? how great and valuable the assistance which it renders to fishers of souls? how strictly the Lord required its observance in those first fishermen, the apostles, whom He permitted to ‘carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes?’”

And elsewhere he said: “Take as your pattern the lives of the holy fathers of old; after the example of the saints, live in such poverty, that what you may have to give for your churches and the adornment of your altars and other sacred objects, may not be merely the overflow of your superfluity, but rather savings stolen by mortification from your necessary maintenance.”

It has been surely by a divine guidance, and for the good of the priests who live in the world, as well as of the

laity, that the vicar of Christ has recently so strongly recommended to us the study of the life and conduct of St. Francis, "the poor man of Assisi."

We have dwelt at length upon the counsel of voluntary poverty for two reasons. First, because the luxury of the age is fashionable and penetrates everywhere. In our schools and colleges are to be found conveniences and comforts which fifty years ago no student dreamt of. On the plea of health, the plea of progress, the plea of fashion and of necessity, requirements and expenses are multiplied. These are the marks of modern civilization.

We of the clergy are in danger, and it is right to recognize the danger. We are in danger of succumbing to the easy-going ways, to the softness and self-indulgence of the age. Our clerical colleges contain a large lay element, and though this is an advantage on the one side, its influence upon the severer apostolic spirit needs to be closely watched and counteracted.

The priest is not a layman in Orders, on a social level with the attorney and the doctor. Everywhere he stands alone, associated with the apostles for the conversion and salvation of the world: and he needs *their* spirit. Venerable old priests notice with sadness how many of the young have become particular and exacting in food, furniture, comfort, and means for enjoyment. Not only do some of them look for holidays longer than were ever enjoyed by the old missionary priests of England, but large sums of money are often spent on foreign travel, perhaps every year, while some will even disguise their priesthood, in order to be the more free—as though it were ever fit for a priest to seek his

pleasure and relaxation in company, or in places, where the ecclesiastical dress proves to be an unpleasant restraint. Such cases as these, no doubt, are the exception—for it would be difficult to point to any priesthood in Europe more laborious and self-denying than the Catholic clergy of England; still they show the influence of the spirit of the world, and the danger of a setting in of a depreciation of the hardness and self-denial which are marks of the true soldier of Jesus Christ. A declension from the apostolic spirit may be arrested in the beginning, but if it put on a momentum, and become general, what power on earth can restore it?

While speaking of the counsel of poverty and hardness to self, as shown in the Life of St. JOHN BAPTIST DE ROSSI, it must not for a moment be supposed that he confounded dirt and untidiness with self-denial. Though we read that he had so well learned the art of "going without," that he was satisfied with a piece of string and two nails for a wardrobe, and wore only simple and common stuffs, we also read that "he was very particular as to cleanliness. Like St. Francis of Sales, he had adopted the maxim of St. Bernard, that one should detest dirt and negligence in one's clothes as much as the appearance of vanity and conceit. 'Let us content ourselves,' he used to say, 'with what is absolutely necessary.'" As the counsel of personal poverty, then, is compatible with personal cleanliness, so is it with living, like St. Charles, in a well-built house, and with a genial, though unpretentious, hospitality.

The other reason for dwelling on this counsel is, because it is impossible to expect the conversion of a people absorbed and mad, like the English, in the pursuit

of wealth, by any kind of conformity with their spirit of greed. Men will not learn to despise houses and lands and riches for Christ's sake, if they see that the ministers of Christ are covetous and attached to them. St. John Chrysostom, answering the objection that the apostles converted the world by miracles, says, "No, not by miracles, but by contempt of wealth, by contempt of glory, and freedom from all worldly concerns. Had they raised ten thousand dead to life, and been wanting in contempt for the riches and glory of the world, so far from doing good, they would have been accounted deceivers."

But forced, as we are, to become bankers and builders for the churches, the schools, the houses of refuge of the people, the situation is perilous to an unspeakable degree. Our only security is in the steady growth and maintenance in the soul of the clergy of this conviction, that a priest's life and conduct must be laid upon the obvious and broad Gospel maxims, which favour poverty and the poor rather than riches and the rich. The example to follow is that set forth in practice by Christ, the apostles, and the saints, down to the last saints canonized, John Baptist de Rossi and Joseph Benedict Labre.

14. Nearly thirty years ago, when preparing, in obedience to the direction of the late Cardinal Wiseman, to take part in the education of the clergy, we held several long conferences with that learned and profound biblical scholar and priest, the late Professor Windishmann, at that time Vicar-General to Cardinal Reisach in Munich. Among other questions, we asked him this one: "What do you consider is the perfection of a secular priest? and what is the best way to promote it?"—We quote from the

pages of a journal written at the time.—He replied: “A priest’s perfection does not consist in a great multitude of prayers and exterior mortifications self-imposed,—these are consistent with life in a cloister, but not with the active charity of a priest in the world. A secular priest’s perfection consists in a great love of God, just as does that of a religious. The means to attain it are to be found in doing the Will of God, for in doing His Will perfectly we attain the perfection to which God calls us. Now, for every one, but especially for a secular priest, obedience is the way to perfection,—great reverence and love for the authority and voice of the Church, and a determination to obey all her ordinances, and to follow her spirit in everything. Some priests question the Church’s right, sneer at such regulations as mortify them, and obey her grudgingly, setting their own private spirit up as a guide.

“Next to obedience to the Church, comes obedience to the Bishop. If the Bishop applies an ordinance of the Church to his diocese, his voice is then identical with that of the Church. In his administrative capacity he may err in judgment, he may be narrow-minded and at fault. In that case the priest should say, God can choose such a one to be the means of my salvation; he is in God’s place towards me,—I must obey. He may make a proper representation to the Bishop once; but let him beware of forcing him morally by importunities.

“As a consequence of obedience, first to the laws and spirit of the Church, and then to one’s Bishop, this rule is arrived at,—that we must never seek for distinguished employments and positions which the natural man covets. When a priest is once settled in a place by his Bishop,

beware of a restless desire to change. His sanctity is perhaps attached to that place. If there be good reason for a change, he may respectfully represent his feelings and reasons to the Bishop, and leave the rest to him. They belong to an abominable class who are perpetually asking their Bishop for a change. It proceeds sometimes from sensuality, that is, from a desire to shirk the cross. A trouble has come, and they have not love of God enough to meet it. Let them consider poor laymen, with their families, and all the trials they have to endure, and cannot shirk. How can priests console them if they are themselves always flying from pain and anxiety? Sometimes pride is the cause; they think they are underrated by the Bishop, and that they are capable of better things. When I hear of a priest constantly seeking for change, I lose all good opinion of him; the best excuse I can make for him is—weakness of character and want of perseverance.”

Such were the remarkable words in which this great and truly holy man declared his conviction that obedience is the rule for a priest who desires to be perfect.

But as we are writing this Introduction in great measure for the benefit of those who are about to be ordained, we may be permitted to dwell a little longer on the importance of obedience in a priest. St. Catherine of Siena used to say that “obedience was the measure of humility, and humility the measure of obedience.” And it is but natural, after the Son of God had triumphed over sin and death, and purchased for us the rewards of eternal life, by having become “obedient unto death,” that the great victories of the saints should be won also by obedience, and that Jesus Christ should will that the lives of

His priests should resemble His own, in the practice of this particular virtue. There is, therefore, no comparison between the amount of obedience required of a priest and of a layman. Not to speak of the general laws of the Church, which place the life and conduct of the clergy under rule and obedience, there are the decrees of provincial and diocesan synods, which claim their obedience; and then, as the Bull *Romanos Pontifices* declares, "when the law is silent the authority of the Bishop stands in the place of law," the Bishop's being the living voice of the office and authority created by God. Hence it follows that the priest's life is truly a life of obedience.

After years spent in the practice of obedience in the seminary, the day at last comes when, in the ordination service, the priest, placing his hands upon the knees and in the hands of the Bishop, solemnly promises "reverence and obedience" to his Bishop. This solemn promise lifts him who makes it into a life of obedience, higher than that which is demanded of the flock. It secures that the works of his ministry, so far as they are in conformity with his promise, shall be recognized, accepted, and, as it were, engrafted into the great world-wide work of the Good Shepherd.

How highly the saints have esteemed this solemn promise, and how dependent they have considered their work for souls to be upon union with Christ through the Bishop, may be seen in many places, but it appears nowhere more clearly than in the Life of St. Francis Xavier. We read in F. Coleridge's *Life and Letters of St. Francis*, that "On landing at Goa he went to the Bishop, and informed him of his mission from the Pope and the king,



showing him his letters and faculties, including that which appointed him Apostolic Delegate. At the same time he declared that he had no desire or intention of using the extraordinary powers conferred upon him, except so far as it seemed good and advisable to the Bishop himself. This absolute deference to the ordinary ecclesiastical authority was a fixed principle with him during the whole of his missionary career, as it was also uniformly insisted upon by St. Ignatius in Europe. Francis adopted the principle, *not* merely out of prudence, but in order that his work might have the blessing of obedience upon it, as well as that of perfect union with the representatives of divine authority in the Church." (Vol. 1, p. 125.)

From many examples to be found in his letters of how he dealt with his own religious, who were exempt, we may judge what the saint's instructions would have been to those who form the ordinary clergy of the diocese. We may make one selection from a letter written to Father Cipriani. Speaking of the Bishop's Vicar, he says: "If the Vicar does not act as he ought, most certainly he will not be taught better by such reproofs from you, especially when they are pressed upon him so imprudently, as has been the case now.....Understand that all things are brought about by humility. If you cannot do as much as you wish, do what you can accomplish in quietness and goodness.....Good that is done without offence or disturbance, even though in itself no greater than this little line —, is much better and greater than good gained in another way, though it appears ever so much larger, so as to be expressed by a line that reaches across the whole page.....That speech of yours certainly has a very grand

sound. 'What? Can we endure in silence to see injury done to God's glory, and obstacles placed in the way of saving souls?' How then? Do you repair that injury, or do you heap fresh mischief upon it, by the storm and tumult of detestable quarrels? I repeat it, you will never obtain from the Vicar by threats and contentions what you cannot obtain by modesty and humility." (Vol. ii. p. 418.)

But besides the solemn promise of obedience to the Bishop, made at ordination, the Holy See has consecrated and raised still higher the state of priests in missionary countries, by ordaining them on the title of a missionary oath. This oath includes in express words a vow *de bono meliori*, to labour for life in the work of the salvation of souls, subject in every sort of way to the direction and jurisdiction of the Bishop. The words are as follows: "*Voveo pariter et juro, quod in hac Diœcesi perpetuo in divinis administrandis laborem meum et operam, sub omni-modâ directione et jurisdictione R. P. D. pro tempore Ordinarii, pro salute animarum impendam.*"

The various clauses and restrictions preceding and following these words, add additional force and concentration to this magnificent consecration of the soul to the apostolic life. It is not a religious vow; it may be called an *Apostolic* vow—as binding for life and as sacred as a vow of religion, dispensation from it being similarly reserved to the Pope.

What sacrifice of self-will, what noble generosity this vow implies, may be seen by a brief examination of its meaning. First, it binds a man to labour for life in a particular district, thus concentrating his attention and work in a most practical manner, and cutting off the root of

fickleness, and of that restless desire to roam abroad in quest of excitement, and of mere change of place and scene, which is so common. So strictly is this interpreted that the Holy See alone has power to transfer a priest, who has taken this vow, from one diocese or bishop to another, even of the same province. Next, it places the priest under perpetual holy obedience to a superior, not chosen by himself, but by God, in whatever concerns the great apostolic work of his life. There is in this, as one may easily see, a distinctive element of generosity and of trust in Jesus Christ. It includes and is more than a vow of stability.

And lastly, what is the motive, what the end, of this sublime sacrifice? Nothing less than the love of God, and the love of souls. "If you love Me, feed My sheep, feed My lambs." "Greater love no man hath than to lay down his life for his friends."

Spiritual writers tell us that whatever is done under the vow of obedience receives an additional and special merit and reward. How amply will this reflection encourage those who have sworn an oath and taken a vow to give their lives to the sacred ministry, and to spend them "*sub omnimoda directione Ordinarii*"!

Whether they be sent to a town or a country mission, whether they be employed in a college as a teacher of grammar or as prefect, whether their work place them under the eye of the world, or leave them hidden in obscurity,—it is all pastoral, all apostolical work they are engaged in, guaranteed a double reward under their promise and their vow. They are well assured that obedience to their Bishop makes their union with the Prince of Pastors absolutely complete, so far as their work

is concerned. They know, moreover, that the merit of work consists, not in the nature or excellence of the thing they are engaged in, but in the perfection of the intention and the measure of divine love with which it is undertaken. The hidden humble lives of Mary and Joseph were of a more exalted merit than the miracles of St. Peter and the preaching of St. Paul. So, too, the humblest office of the apostolic ministry may become as meritorious as the most resplendent. These thoughts are enough to fill with a singing joy and gladness the heart of a priest, whom the world accounts exiled and lost in some lone country mission, but who is there in obedience to the voice of his Bishop. He, at least, knows full well that he could not do the Will of God better than by being where he is.

We could greatly desire that the missionary oath and vow were made more of than it is. The vows of religion are taken after long preparation and retreat, and often with considerable solemnity, and their devout annual renewal serves much to renew the first fervour with which they were taken. Why might not the mission oath be always taken at the end of a retreat, during which its meaning and merit had been carefully dwelt upon, and in the presence of the community, solemnly as a religious function? And then, how suitably it might be renewed privately every year on one of the three chief festivals of St. Peter the apostle, or on the anniversary of the day on which it was taken, according to the exhortation published by the Holy See. (April 27, 1871.) A Plenary Indulgence is granted on the day upon which the mission oath is first taken, and upon every anniversary when it is renewed. How many, for want of thought, have never

fully appreciated the privileges and blessings of their state !\*

It must not, however, be supposed that the mission oath, while consecrating devotedness and assuring conformity with the Will of the Divine Head of the Church, is meant to destroy that free spirit of apostolic initiation and suggestion, by means of which God at all times has wrought such wonders in the Church. On the contrary, whatever work belongs to the apostolic ministry is open to the secular clergy ; and all over the Church, in every diocese, works are undertaken through the initiation and zeal of priests, and are recognized and blessed by the Bishop. There are places and obligations in every diocese that must be provided for, to the necessities of which all private attractions must give way, and the Bishop may have many works of zeal for which he may claim the full strength of his subjects. But wherever the Bishop gives to a priest charge of souls, and wherever he leaves him with time at his disposal, as he may do in dioceses where the clergy are exceedingly numerous,

\* The following is the authentic form prescribed by the Holy See.

"Ego N. Filius N. Diocesis N. spondeo et juro, quod, postquam ad sacros Ordines promotus fuero, nullam Religionem, Societatem, aut Congregationem regularem, sine speciali Sedis Apostolicæ licentia, aut S. Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, ingrediar, neque in earum aliqua professionem emitam.

"Voveo pariter et juro, quod in hac Diocesi perpetuo in divinis administrandis laborem meum ac operam, sub omnimoda directione et jurisdictione R. P. D. pro tempore Ordinarii, pro salute animarum impendam ; quod etiam præstabo, si, cum prædictæ Sedis Apostolicæ licentia, Religionem, Societatem, aut Congregationem regularem ingressus fuero, et in earum aliqua professionem emisero. Item voveo, et juro, me prædictum juramentum, et ejus obligationem intelligere, et observaturum. Sic me Deus adjuvet et hæc Sancta Dei Evangelia.

he must be understood to say, "Consider with yourself what services you can render to God;—aid me in the salvation of the souls committed to my care, in such ways as I can bless,—spend and be spent in conformity with my pastoral solicitude, according to your grace: *nemo sibi pontifex.*"

The Life of St. JOHN BAPTIST is singularly rich in examples of this kind of initiation and zeal, living, as he did, in the midst of a multitude of clergy. In him the dictum of St. Augustine was again verified, "*intellectus cogitabundus principium omnis boni.*" He was ever examining what kind of distress was the most urgent, and thinking how he could meet it. He was never idle: mind and heart were ever at work. Very instructive examples, too, will be found in his Life as to the conciliatory gentleness and perseverance with which he comported himself when subjected to jealousy on account of his zeal and success, where his seniors had failed, and as to the sweetness and patience with which he bore the ill-humour and madness of the old canon under whom he lived, showing himself, as he did all through life, in a thousand different ways, a model of meekness and cheerful obedience for generations to come.

One more observation, connected with the life of obedience and of liberty enjoyed by a secular priest—to be carefully considered by the ecclesiastical student. A secular priest must live by rule, a rule based upon the nature of the sacerdotal life, and proportioned to his character, grace, and duties. He can draw up such a rule under the advice of his director, and can follow it in obedience. It must be a rule that touches his rising, meditation, Mass,

prayers, visit, and other duties. If he think, because he is not a monk, that he may live with his mind all abroad, by impulse and without rule, or if he know that he has not sufficient self-mastery to lead a life of rule by himself, let him be well assured that he has no vocation to be a secular priest. He may go into a convent perhaps, and live safely under the rule and surveillance of a holy community, or he may go into the world as a layman, and settle. But if he live, as a secular priest, without rule, his salvation will ever be in fearful jeopardy, and his fall may be heard of any day. It is needless to say that St. JOHN BAPTIST DE ROSSI, though called to no order, lived by a rule adapted to his vocation and grace.

15. Before concluding this Introduction, a few words must be added on the devotions of a priest. A missionary priest is not to be overburdened with practices of devotion. "The devotion of all devotions," says St. Alphonsus, "is the love of Jesus Christ, and the frequent thought of the love which this dear Redeemer has borne, and ever bears to us."

The priest who does not love the Blessed Sacrament is soulless, and only half a priest; he is a *lusus naturæ* in the order of grace, deformed or half-formed. If the mother loves the son she has begotten but once, what should be the love of the priest for his Saviour and King, who is born of his words every day, laid in his hands as in the manger, on the altar as on the cross, and is then buried in his very vitals as in the tomb!

To say Mass for the people, and to carry Him to the sick, is not love, unless there be faith and devotion. What kind of love is that which hurries to the altar with little

or no preparation and thanksgiving, which leaves the sanctuary in filth and neglect, which never makes a visit of devotion? How can the Lord save such a one in the flood, or shelter him in the storm? Let us ever remember that Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, from the tabernacle, governs the Church, and sanctifies souls.

We do not urge the need of the spirit of prayer,—“the great means of salvation,” nor of mortification, zeal, and other virtues; neither do we mention even one of the variety of devout practices, which are ever blooming, like flowers, in the garden of the Church, because everything a priest needs will follow true love of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. Let him ask unceasingly, and labour for this one grace—the love of Jesus,—and all other things will be added unto him. Jesus in the Eucharist is like the sun in the heaven, the source of all light and warmth, and the condition of life itself.

ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE ROSSI’S great devotion was to the Blessed Sacrament. In this, as in so many other things, he is the model for priests. To say nothing of his celebration of Holy Mass, of the care he took of everything connected with the sanctuary during the years he was head sacristan at St. Maria in Cosmedin, and of his exhortations to priests upon love for the Blessed Sacrament,—it may suffice to say here that he spent all the time he could spare from his active works of charity in the presence of our Lord.

The latter part of his life he spent in the Hospital of the Santissima Trinità de’ Pellegrini, where he died, as a most zealous and devout member of the arch-confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament, which is there established. His



visits, day and night, to his dear Lord and Master were continual, and his face was often seen to beam with radiance as he knelt before our Lord exposed upon the Altar.

We have spoken further back of the study of the works of the Fathers, as highly calculated to inspire solid devotion and piety. Here is a single illustration of our meaning, taken from St. John Chrysostom, exciting us, by well pondered reasons, to the love of God, and of that marvel of His love to us, the Blessed Eucharist. If the extract be lengthy, it will afford abundant sweet food.

“How long are we to be fastened to the earth, and grovel like worms in the dirt? God hath given us a body of earth that we might carry it up with us to heaven, not that we should draw our soul down with it to earth. Earthy it is, but if we please, it may become heavenly. See how highly God hath honoured us, in committing to us so excellent a frame. I created heaven and earth, He says, and to you I give the power of creation. Make your earth heaven. It is in your power. *‘I am He that maketh and transformeth all things,’* saith God of Himself. And He hath given to men a similar power,—as a painter, being an affectionate father, teaches his own art to his son. I formed thy body beautiful, He says, but I give thee the power of forming something better. Make thy soul beautiful. I said, *‘Let the earth bring forth the green herb, and every fruitful tree.’* Do thou also say, let this earth, this body, bring forth its proper fruit; and what thou wilt to produce, will be produced. I make the summer and the cloud. I create the lightning and the wind. I formed the devil to make sport with him, nor have I grudged thee the like power.

Thou, if thou wilt, canst sport with him, and bind him as thou wouldst a sparrow. I make the sun to rise upon the good and the evil. Do thou imitate Me by imparting of what is thine to the good and the evil. When mocked I bear with it, and do good to those who mock Me. Do thou imitate Me as thou canst. I do good, not to be requited; do thou imitate Me, and do good, not to be repaid. I have lighted luminaries in the heavens; do thou light others brighter than these, for thou canst, by enlightening those that are in error. For to know Me is a greater benefit than to behold the sun. Thou canst not create a man, but thou canst make him just and acceptable to God. I formed his substance, do thou beautify his will. See how I love thee, and have given thee power in the greater things.

“Beloved, see how we are honoured! yet some are so unreasonable and so ungrateful as to say: ‘Why are we endowed with free will?’ But how, in all the particulars which we have mentioned, could we have imitated God, if there had been no free will?

“I rule angels, He says, and so dost thou, through Him who is ‘*the first-fruits, Christ.*’ I sit on a royal throne, and thou art seated with Me, in Him who is the First-fruits. As it is said, ‘*He hath raised us up together, and hath made us sit together in the heavenly places, through Christ Jesus.*’ Through Him who is the First-fruits, Cherubim and Seraphim adore Thee, with all the heavenly host, Principalities and Powers, Thrones and Dominations. Disparage not thy body, then, to which in Christ such high honours appertain, that the bodiless powers tremble at it.

“But what shall I say? It is not in this way only that

I have shown My love to thee, but by what I have suffered. For thee I was spit upon, I was scourged, I emptied Myself of glory, I left My Father and came to thee, who dost hate Me, and turn from Me, and art loath to hear My name. I pursued thee, I ran after thee, that I might overtake thee. I united and joined thee to Myself; 'Eat Me, drink Me,' I said. Above I hold thee, and below I embrace thee. Is it not enough for thee that I have thy First-fruits above? Doth not this satisfy thy affection? I descended below: I am not only mingled with thee, I am entwined in thee; I am masticated, broken into minute particles, that the interspersion, and commixture, and union may be more complete. Things united remain yet in their own limits, but I am interwoven with thee. I would have no more any division between us; I will that we both be one." (*St. John Chrysostom, Hom. in I. Tim.*)

After such language and such thoughts, it seems almost trivial to say that the good priest will never fail, as far as opportunity allows, to spread devotion to Jesus in the Eucharist, and to visit and honour Him daily. It is sometimes noticed with amazement by the laity that occasionally a priest is met with who never seems to make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament. Let us never retire to rest, if we live near the church, without having made our devout visit during the day, or without having said at least "good night" to our Divine Master in the tabernacle.\*

\* It may prove useful to some to refer to a little work called "The Mass," considered simply in its doctrinal and devotional significance, by the *Bishop of Salford*, Burns and Oates, price *two-pence*; and to a much larger and more profound and exhaustive work, called "The Holy Mass," by Father Müller, C.S.S.R. Pustet, publisher, New York. Price *ten shillings and sixpence*.

16. Devotion to saints may be called a secondary devotion. But there are three saints who stand each alone, in different degrees, above all others, whom priests especially ought to honour,—MARY, JOSEPH, and PETER. To any other saint devotion may be a matter of private and personal attraction.

And first, as to MARY.

It is impossible to speak of ecclesiastical training, and of the sacerdotal life, without speaking of the Mother of God. "Take it as a rule," said Dr. Windishmann, whom we have already quoted, "that no person is called to be a priest who is incapable of receiving impressions of devotion to our Blessed Lady. A repentant sinner, with true devotion to the Blessed Virgin, is a far safer subject for ordination than he who has never been a great sinner, but is proof against her attraction and claims. I would say that he who is not devout to Mary can never be a good priest, and I should myself never feel sure of his salvation. Take this as an unerring rule, when you have any responsibility in the training of young men for the priesthood."

St. JOHN BAPTIST's devotion to the Blessed Virgin, particularly under the title of "Virgin of Divine Love," was well known to all who came within his influence. His face used to light up with joy as he spoke of her whom he loved to call "his Mother." He made a solemn promise to serve her, and to do all in his power to induce others to serve her also.

Closely connected with devotion to Mary is devotion to her most holy spouse, St. JOSEPH.

St. JOHN BAPTIST learnt from his study of their lives, that St. Francis of Sales had a special devotion to St.

Joseph, and used always to carry one picture in his breviary,—a picture of St. Joseph; and that St. Vincent of Paul used to set St. Joseph before all his priests as their model, to place all his seminaries under his patronage, and to require all his missionaries to place themselves and their labours under his care, and everywhere to spread devotion to him, as well as to the Mother of God. The Holy See, by placing the whole Church under the direct patronage of St. Joseph, and by indulgencing prayers to him for priests, seems to have suggested to all priests the cultivation of a particular devotion to this great patriarch; for to him, as to a missionary priest, was committed the duty of carrying about Jesus and Mary; to him, as to the priest to-day, was committed the responsibility of caring and providing for the life and the honour of the Mother and Son.

To one other saint all priests would do well to encourage an intelligent and personal devotion, that is, to St. PETER, whom St. Ambrose admirably calls “the vicar of God’s love.” The reasons for this devotion are some peculiar to England, some special to the time in which we live, others personal, professional, and Catholic. We have endeavoured to set forth these reasons, and the life and character of St. Peter upon other occasions,\* and must not now dwell upon them any further.

St. JOHN BAPTIST entertained such a devotion to St. Peter as the Head of the Priesthood, and centre of its

\* *Peter-tide, or St. Peter’s Month*; being Instructions on the particular virtues of St. Peter, and on his sufferings and death, with hymn set to music, and prayers; price two-pence. *Loyalty to Blessed Peter, and the tribute of Peter Pence*. Price four-pence. Burns and Oats.

unity, that he used always to take young priests, after their ordination, to the shrine of St. Peter, there to consecrate their lives to God on the very body of the apostle. This pious practice, which our saint was the first to introduce, is carried out in Rome to this day after a priest's ordination.

It would seem desirable that the secular priest especially should cultivate devotion to St. Peter, because, having no particular founder to invoke as a father, like the regulars, he should attach himself the more devoutly to St. Peter, the great head of his order, under Christ. Thus the Abbé Bourdoise, the friend and companion of M. Olier, when asked to what order he belonged, used to answer, "To the order of St. Peter, the oldest and most distinguished in the world."

17. As to particular devotions to other saints, it is, as we have said, a matter of personal attraction; and attractions will differ. ST. JOHN BAPTIST, as a youth, placed himself under the care of St. Aloysius; as soon as he became a priest he began to study continually, and to form himself upon, the Lives of St. Philip Neri, St. Francis of Sales, and St. Vincent of Paul,—eminently fit models for the practical life of a secular priest. To these many will now add the Life of ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE ROSSI himself. In many ways he reminds one of St. Philip Neri. Added to the attraction of a beautiful and sympathetic countenance, in spite of its extreme pallor, and his dignified figure, there was a simplicity of manner and a brightness of holiness which gave him a wonderful ascendancy over souls, like that of St. Philip himself.

We doubt not that, as the life and character of St. JOHN

BAPTIST DE ROSSI become known, he will be studied and invoked as a patron and model of the secular clergy in Great Britain, Ireland, and America. He will powerfully assist, by his example and his prayers, in that great upheaval and improvement in ecclesiastical education which is actually going on; and especially will he promote that desire, with which God is inspiring so many of His priests, to embrace more generously the apostolic life. This life stands out in marked contrast with the selfishness and materialism of the world. Its watchwords are Faith and Love, with the *abneget semetipsum* of the Gospel. Charity, tender sympathy for souls, proving itself in a thousand acts of self-denial, is capable of winning and converting whole populations where all other means are found to fail. This love and self-denial for our brethren springs like a vigorous shoot out of that ardent and absorbing love of Christ, which is the essence and the very soul of the apostolic life.

And not only will St. JOHN BAPTIST be loved and invoked by the secular clergy, but by all priests engaged in the salvation of the poor, and by the devout laity, too, in proportion to their sympathy with his mission to the Church.

✠ HERBERT, BISHOP OF SALFORD.

FEAST OF ST. JOSEPH, 1833.  
BISHOP'S HOUSE,  
SALFORD.

## PREFACE OF THE AUTHOR.

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**T**HE eighteenth century is too often considered as a cycle of universal religious ruin. People only see that terrible period which culminated in the catastrophe of the French revolution, and this thought makes them forget the true glories of which this era was not altogether deprived.

Europe, it is true, in spite of the cultivation of letters, and the progress made in physical sciences, presented everywhere a sad spectacle. Sceptic philosophy had triumphed in France; the epicurean and peaceful atheism of the seventeenth century had become a scientific, aggressive, and audacious theory; the sardonic smiles and sacrilegious scorn of free-thinkers were pleasant to a debased people, who were only too ready to applaud any attacks against God and His Church. Jansenism had only a few ignorant sectarians as its leaders, who fell into ridicule at the cemetery of St. Médard; but this ridicule reacted against the orthodox faith, and its promoters made it a powerful arm against the truth.

The other nations of Europe were in a deplorable state. Russia was a heap of ruins. The infamy and crimes of Catherine were reproduced by her successors, who prolonged the sanguinary tyranny of their ancestress. In England the house of Hanover, to keep their place on the



throne, persecuted the Catholics, and perpetuated the penal laws, which seemed destined to destroy the last remnants of the Roman Catholic Faith in the kingdom. Austria for a time enjoyed a period of tranquillity under Maria Teresa; but soon she too yielded to the puerile caprices of Joseph II., who, by his fatal influence and pretended religious reforms, troubled the peace and endangered the unity of the empire of the Hapsburgs. Nevertheless Europe, as a whole, had not revolted against God. Italy had, up to that time, remained faithful. The consoling aspect of Italy offered some compensation to the Head of the Church for the outrages and the defection of other nations. Whereas, elsewhere, men of learning and wit proclaimed themselves atheists, in Italy science and faith made an intimate alliance, and worked in concert. Excellent Popes, both learned and pious, succeeded one another without intermission in the Chair of Peter. They protected, encouraged, and directed all scientific movements. On all sides came forth eminent men, while the most humble cities in the Peninsula became centres of erudition.

At this very time fresh and enlarged editions of the great Benedictine works of a past century were produced. Other most important labours were brought to light. Every religious order could boast of a learned member: witness the Jesuit, Tiraboschi: the great Dominican Fathers, Mammachi and Orsi; the Theatine, Piazzi; the Observantine, Bianchi; Father Mansi, of the Clerks of the Mother of God; and many more. Sacred sciences were illustrated by the great Pope Benedict XIV., by Cardinals Gerdil and Zaccaria, by the brothers Ballrini, and others;

profane science by Pergolese and Winckelmann. But in addition to all these great scientific names, Italy, during this eighteenth century, shone even more brightly by her saints. A few dates will suffice to prove this fact. From 1710 to 1787 there died the Blessed Valfrey (the apostle of Turin), Bonaventura di Potenza (a Religious of St. Francis), Cardinal Tomasi, St. Francesco di Girolamo, St. Pacifico di San Severino, St. Veronica Giuliana, the Blessed Tomaso di Cora, St. Giuseppe della Croce, the Venerable Parisi, the Blessed Angelo d'Acri, the Venerable Tenderini, the Blessed Crispino di Viterbo, St. Leonardo de Porta Maurizio, St. Paulo della Croce, St. Alfonso Liguori, and last, not least, St. Giovanni Battista de Rossi. Many of these saints lived or died in Rome. This great stream of supernatural life manifested itself specially in the capital of the Christian world, and the ardent zeal of that phalanx of holy priests, of which the Blessed de Rossi was the model and the guide, produced marvels of sanctity among the people.

The life of this holy canon is not at all known in France, but it deserves to be so. Now that the holy Father is about to place this humble priest on the altars of the Catholic Church, his biography seems to us to be needed, and to fill up a void. "The lives of the saints," de Rossi used to say, "are like second gospels, for they show in practice the result of our Saviour's teaching." We had these words continually before our eyes while writing down, for the edification of the faithful, facts concerning him, which are in themselves eloquent lessons.

In an existence so simple, so hidden, so obscure, in fact, filled up by one succession of sacrifices and acts of self-

abnegation, it was difficult to follow any strict chronological order. It appeared to us preferable to group certain events under a few general heads, and to show forth his extraordinary virtues more fully than any mere incidents in his life. The principal sources from which this work has been compiled are the process of his beatification and canonization, a contemporary life of the saint published in Rome in 1768, by one of his greatest friends, John Mary Toietti; another biography of him, by Father Tavani, of the Society of Jesus, published also in Rome in 1768; and the small collection of his sermons preserved at St. Galla. We have stated nothing which did not come from one or other of these sources, but we have not thought it necessary to give chapter and verse for each of our extracts.

In the work itself we have had but two objects in view. To show, first of all, that sanctity may be acquired, not only by heroic actions, but especially by ordinary ones performed in a perfect manner; and next, to prove what can be effected by the devotion of a man deprived of all human advantages, but never flinching from his work, and simply relying with entire confidence on God. These two lessons stand out prominently, as it were, throughout the whole of de Rossi's life. God grant that our labour may bring forth fruit to His glory and the good of souls.

E. MOUGEOT,

*Doctor in Theology,*

*And Secretary of H. E. Cardinal Pitra.*

1881.

# ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE ROSSI.

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## FIRST PART.

### His Birth and Youth.

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#### CHAPTER I.

##### Birth and Early Years of St. John the Baptist de Rossi.

HIS FAMILY.—HIS EARLY YEARS.—HE IS TAKEN TO GENOA.—

HIS UNCLE MAKES HIM COME TO ROME.



SAINT JOHN BAPTIST DE ROSSI was born at Voltaggio, a little town in the diocese of Genoa, on the 22nd February, 1698. His father, Charles de Rossi, and his mother, whose maiden name was Frances Anfossi, were not reckoned among the rich people of the country.

We know that God, when calling to Himself certain members of such or such a family, has no regard to rank or riches, but simply to individual virtue. His father, however, bore the title of *signore*, which was universally accorded to him less for his wealth than for his high moral qualities. And, in fact, though little is known to us of this Charles de Rossi, who was soon called to a better life, we have abundant evidence of the care he took of

the Christian education of his children, and with what well-regulated affection he looked after their welfare.

His family consisted of two boys and two girls. One of the former received the name of John the Baptist at his baptism. Like his holy patron, this child, by his pure and mortified youth, was destined to preach the divine word, and lead many to Jesus by his excellent example. St. John the Baptist preached penance: the mission of the child was specially that of purifying consciences; and by his zeal for the remission of sins he was to become one of the most powerful instruments in the sacrament of penance.

Those who knew the little John Baptist were instantly struck by his happy dispositions. The unutterable sweetness of his disposition, his quiet calm of manner, above all, the joyous expression of his face, won every heart. These natural and precious qualities greatly assisted the designs God had upon him in the future.

But if he won the esteem of men, he was equally deserving of the favour of God. From the first, piety and purity were his two great characteristics. The parish church of St. Mary was his favourite haunt; no sooner was the class over in the morning than he flew there to serve all the Masses he could find. So far from being tired, he was as fervent at the last as at the first; so that every one was filled with admiration as they watched him, and marked his special reverence while serving. This precocious piety was not, however, either forced or cold. He had a natural grace in whatever he did, which never seemed to fail him. The gravity and modesty he showed in holy places struck all who saw him, and many declared

he was like a little angel just come down from heaven, and still full of the vision of God.

The boy seemed to understand from his earliest years that, in the words of holy writ, purity is a treasure which we bear in a fragile vase. While he listened eagerly to pious or edifying discourses, he early showed the greatest disgust for any loose or immodest conversation, or any joke of a doubtful tendency. His companions, full of fun and spirits, would sometimes indulge in sports and words contrary to his favourite virtue. But if this ever happened in John Baptist's presence, he would walk away gravely, without saying a word. This way of acting, while it suited his natural sweetness, was in reality the best he could have adopted; for it not only removed him from danger, but left the others to feel the remorse of their own consciences. In fact, on several occasions it produced the happiest effect, and the better-disposed boys would follow his example, and abjure for ever dangerous company or loose conversation. His masters were not slow in perceiving and appreciating his merits. He was first placed under the care of two very holy priests, Scipio Gaetano and Joseph Repetto, who were at the head of the college at Voltaggio, and very soon the little John Baptist became their favourite pupil. He was a model of obedience, never transgressed a known rule, or caused annoyance to any one. He was equally admirable towards his own parents, and was at home, as at school, ever docile and pious.\* The older he grew, the more amiable

\* *Summar. Virt.* Deposition of Toietti. "Come sono stato ragguagliato si distinguersi fin da fanciullo, il servo di Dio, G. B. de Rossi fra quei altri fratelli e sorelle, nella pietà e devozione."

he became. His beautiful face was full of intelligence and goodness; his voice was charming; and his playful, witty, yet innocent conversation, won the love of all those who were thrown into communication with him.

But God had in store a wider scope for his virtues than the little town of Voltaggio, and providence, which makes use of little events to compass her ends, led him, by an unexpected channel, to the capital of the Christian world.

The beauty of Voltaggio often attracted rich Genoese families, who came for several months of the year in *villegiatura*, to breathe the fresh mountain air, and escape the heat of the town. John Baptist was only ten years old, when one of the richest and oldest families in Genoa, John Scorza, with his wife, Mary Battina Cambiasi, came and took a villa for the summer at Voltaggio. This holy couple were hearing a Mass one day, served, as usual, by the pious child, when his extraordinary recollection, and earnest, serious manner, attracted their attention. They asked some questions about him, and everybody praised him. Very soon they were able to convince themselves that these praises were not exaggerated. At last they implored his parents to give him up to them, and allow them to undertake his education.

His father, Charles de Rossi, felt that the whole future of his child depended on this decision. If the Scorza family were eminent from their riches and position, they were no less admirable for their virtues. Still, fearing that a residence in a great town might be injurious to his boy's soul, he only consented to the proposal on special conditions. At the risk of losing all worldly advantages, he exacted that a master should be chosen for his son with

the utmost care as to his religious principles, who should live with him in the Scorza palace, and occupy himself entirely with the boy. This was granted, and the little John Baptist started for Genoa with his new protectors. He spent three years with them, and nothing was altered in his conduct or pious habits. Although exposed to many temptations to vanity and self-indulgence in the palace, where he was treated as a son of the house, he preserved the same simplicity and piety, the same love of chastity, and the same ardour for study.

He was just thirteen, when one evening two Capuchin Fathers stopped at the palace on their way to Rome. John Baptist begged to be introduced to them, and with his usual natural grace of manner entreated them to be kind enough to remember him to his uncle, Father Angelo, a Capuchin in great repute at Rome, who then filled the post of Provincial. They were charmed with the boy, and gladly promised to fulfil his request. On their arrival in Rome they at once sought out Father Angelo, and gave him his nephew's message, coupled with such praises of the child, that his uncle earnestly wished to have him with him. He therefore begged his cousin, Dom Laurence de Rossi, Canon of the Church of St. Mary in Cosmedin, to write to John Baptist's mother, and ask her leave to bring him to Rome, God having recalled his father, Charles de Rossi, to Himself. Dom Laurence wrote at once, setting before her the manifest advantages for study and advancement in the ways of perfection which would accrue to the lad by his residence in the holy city. His mother submitted the proposal to the boy himself, who at once accepted it. Taking leave of the Scorza family soon



after, and obtaining a last blessing from his mother at Voltaggio, John left Genoa for Rome, where he arrived in 1711, being then, as we have said, just thirteen years of age. It was in that city that for fifty-three years he was to live and exercise his zeal and charity in the salvation of souls.

This is all that we know of the childhood of John Baptist de Rossi. Growing in wisdom as in years, he was thus prepared, in silence and obscurity, for the great mission to be hereafter entrusted to him by God.

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## CHAPTER II.

### The Condition of the Roman College on John Baptist's first Entrance.

THE HUMBLE BEGINNINGS FROM WHICH THE COLLEGE SPRUNG.—

THE FAVOUR IT OBTAINED FROM THE POPES.—GREGORY XIII.

BUILT A FINE BUILDING.—THE GLORIES OF THE COLLEGE.

ON his arrival at Rome, Dom Laurence received John Baptist with great kindness. He made him lodge and live in his house, treated him as his own son, and gave him all the liberty compatible with the studies on which he at once entered. The canons of St. Mary in Cosmedin wished him to follow the classes at the Roman College, in which his uncle concurred. The time which he passed there was not only a preparation for the apostolate, it was also a real mission. Some details of this college, and its influence on the city of Rome, are here necessary.

About the year 1550 thirteen young Jesuits, under the direction of Father John Lepelletier, settled themselves in two or three houses hired by St. Ignatius, near the church dedicated to St. Venantius, at the foot of the capitol. Largely assisted by the alms of Francis Borgia, Duke of Candia, afterwards General of the Society, they began to teach Greek, Latin, and Hebrew gratuitously.\* The young professors were as humble as they were devout. "We do not pretend to great learning," wrote St. Ignatius to a detractor of the work, "but the little we know we wish to communicate to others for the love of God."

Providence blessed the undertaking, and the class rooms became very soon too small for the crowds who thronged them. A larger house was then hired near the Gesù, and to the course of ancient languages was added those of theology, philosophy, and other sciences. The number of scholars continually increased, but their means were small, their resources were well-nigh exhausted, and some of the religious became anxious. "Go on, go on," exclaimed St. Ignatius, "heaven will supply all our wants."

In 1555, five years after its foundation, the first hundred scholars were scattered throughout Europe, and soon drew attention to the college which had trained them.

The Emperor Ferdinand I., writing to Pius IV., on the 5th March, 1560, says, while remitting a donation to the Roman College, "From this house a great number of men, eminent for their virtues and science, have been sent out,

\* When instituting the Roman College, St. Ignatius took for his type the Paris university, of which he greatly appreciated the method. He insisted that all the first professors should be chosen among the old students of that university.

not only in our dominions, but also in Italy, France, and Belgium, and even to India. There is no year that students do not go forth from this college to propagate truth, defend religion, and bring back the ancient faith among all the kingdoms of the world."

In 1561, Pope Pius IV., after praising the Jesuits, published the following brief:

"We have the first college of this Order in Rome; it is as the nursery of all the others established in Italy, Germany, and France. From this fruitful seminary the Apostolic See draws chosen and capable ministers, like plants full of sap and abounding in fruits, to send them to whatever spots the wants are the greatest. They never refuse any work which has for its aim the honour of God and the service of the Apostolic See. They go without hesitation and without fear, wherever they may be sent, even to the most heretical and infidel countries, and to the extremity of India. We owe, then, an immense deal to this college, which has so well deserved of the Catholic body, and which is so devoted to the service of our Lord Jesus Christ and to the Chair of Peter."

Yet this college had but eleven years of existence when it merited such praise from the mouth of the highest authority.

In 1559 an inundation ruined the house, and the college was transferred to another near the Salviati Palace. Pope Julius III. wished to endow it with two thousand gold scudi, but death prevented his being able to give a legal form to his bequest. Victoria Tolfi, widow of the Marquis Orsini, and niece of Pope Paul IV., gave several houses to the Fathers, one of which was on the site of the actual

Roman College. In 1562 they built a little church, under the title of "The Annunciation." The Jesuits were their own architects and masons, and this was the first sanctuary of the college. Pius IV., delighted at the success of the work, gave it an endowment of six thousand gold scudi. This was the signal for its gradual development under the pontificate of Pius V., though this Pope was too much engrossed in the crusade against the Ottomans to do all he wished for the Roman College. Gregory XIII., who succeeded him in the Chair of Peter, was its real founder. The celebrated Florentine architect, Bartholomew Ammannati, was employed by him to draw out a plan, and, thanks to the Pope's generosity, the first stone was laid in 1582. The building had advanced some way when Gregory came himself to see it, but he was not satisfied with the design. He caused the part which had been erected to be pulled down, and the present Roman College was then erected on a far more magnificent scale, just as we see it in the present day. In addition to this, the Pope assigned large revenues to the college, part of which was specially set apart for the maintenance of two hundred young Jesuits from every nation. From this institution consequently sprang the greater part of the most illustrious members of the Society. The young religious thus gathered together rapidly mastered a variety of languages. They consecrated their hours of leisure and recreation to visiting the prisons, the poor, and the sick; they preached constantly in public places; and during the vacations evangelized the Roman Campagna. Their zeal inflamed their companions in the town, who rivalled them in ardour and good works.

Out of gratitude to Gregory XIII., who had been its founder, the college was likewise called "*The Gregorian University.*" In the principal court there is a fine statue of the Pope, with the following inscription: "*The Roman College has erected this monument to Gregory XIII., of the family of Boncompagni, a great and excellent Pontiff, who was its Founder and Father.*"

## GREGORIUS XIII.

BONCOMPAGNO,

P. O. M.,

FUNDATORI ET PARENTI

COLL: ROM: P.

The Jesuits placed the arms of Pope Gregory XIII. on the façade, with this inscription: "*Gregory XIII., Pope, to Religion and the fine arts.*"

## GREGORIUS XIII., P. M.,

RELIGIONI

AC BONIS ARTIBUS.

Finally, a magnificent church completed the work. St. Ignatius having been canonized on the 12th March, 1622, by Gregory XV., of the Ludovisi family, Cardinal Louis Ludovisi, his nephew, resolved, upon the death of his uncle, to build a magnificent temple in honour of the saint.\* The little Church of the Annunciation was conse-

\* Cardinal Ludovisi had a curious medal struck, which, with the two faces of Gregory XV. and the Cardinal, bore this inscription: "*The one raised Ignatius on the altars, the other raised altars to Ignatius.*" *Alter Ignatium aris admovit, alter aras Ignatio.*

quently pulled down, and on the same site was erected the glorious Church of St. Ignatius, which, though opened in 1650, was only finally completed in 1685, under the pontificate of Innocent XI.

The archives of this college have become celebrated. In the glorious list of its saints we find St. Aloysius of Gonzaga, St. Camillus of Lellius, St. Leonard of Port Maurice, the Blessed Berchmans and de Rossi, the Venerable Peter Berna (martyr) Tenderini, du Tronchet, and many others. When the subject of our biography arrived there, ten students of the college had already been raised to the Chair of Peter. They were Urban VIII. (Barberini), Gregory XV. (Ludovisi), Innocent X. (Pamphili), Clement IX. (Rospigliosi), Clement X. (Altieri), Innocent XII. (Pignatelli), Clement XI. (Albani), Innocent XIII. (Conti), and Clement XII. (Corsini). To this list must be added his Holiness Pope Leo XIII. (Pecci), now gloriously reigning.

The number of illustrious professors who have taught there is equally considerable. The great names of Tolet, Bellarmin, de Lugo, Suarez, Vasquez, Cornelius a Lapide, Pallavicini, Tolomei, Zaccaria, are perhaps the most celebrated; but a multitude of others of rare merit have succeeded one another without interruption in the professorial chairs.

Alongside of these great masters there have ever been found in the Roman College men as remarkable for their great holiness and virtue as for their noble birth, who excel in the training of youth in the paths of perfection. These men, obedient as children to the strict rules of their founder, give to the world the most magnificent examples

of humility and devotion to their wearisome and arduous duties.

It was to masters of this sort that the young John Baptist was entrusted. Upwards of two thousand students met together each day in those vast halls, for since 1582 the Jesuits had already more than that number of pupils. Not only the Romans themselves, but Italians from all parts of Italy, and strangers from the German, Scotch, Greek, English, and Irish colleges, came there to acquire the sciences which they in their turn were to spread in the most distant countries. Grand indeed is the spectacle offered to the world by the city of Rome, that centre of Catholicity, where the children of all nations meet as in a common home.

Banished lately from their glorious college, the sons of St. Ignatius have not forgotten the humble beginnings of their work. They have not allowed themselves to be discouraged. They still hear the words of their founder to those who lost confidence, "Go on; heaven will provide for all our needs." The German College has opened its doors to them, and as in old times, in a strange house, and in spite of the cruel spoliation of which they have been the victims, and which has so brutally despoiled them of the fruits of three centuries of labour, they strive still to bring up new Aloysius Gonzagas, and John Baptist de Rossis, and their earnest toil is crowned with success.

## CHAPTER III.

## Studies of John Baptist.

HIS CONDUCT AT THE ROMAN COLLEGE.—HIS STUDIES.—HIS DEVOTION TOWARDS OUR LADY AND ST. ALOYSIUS OF GONZAGA.—HIS MORTIFICATIONS BRING ON A SERIOUS ILLNESS.

**I**N the little world of college John Baptist was soon remarkable for his success in his studies, and for his great piety. His director was Father Francis Galluzzi, who led him for twenty years in the paths of perfection.

This illustrious Jesuit left a great reputation for holiness in Rome. But what proves his prudence and virtue more than the esteem of men is the good he did in the Roman College among the students committed to his care, and especially among the number called the "*ristretti*," of which we shall speak later. This good Father wrote the lives of several of the children he had trained for God, and who almost all died before him. These little biographies give us a high idea of the fruits then obtained by the education at this college, and of the Father's own tender love for his pupils. The influence of so holy a director, and the centre in which he found himself placed, had a great effect on young John Baptist. Father Galluzzi did not die till 1731, and was always his intimate friend and devoted Father.

From the very first a kind of instinct guided John in the choice of his friends. He eschewed the company of all



who strove to keep him back from the path he had traced out for himself, and his ardour for study sprang from a higher motive than the simple wish of distinguishing himself, namely, the greater glory of God. He soon took his place in the first class, and won the esteem as well as the approbation of his masters. At the end of the year it was the custom to elect the best pupil as "dictator," a title much coveted in the college. Every year this honour was awarded to him. He wrote some poetry at this time, remarkable for its grace and beauty of expression, but his heart was in more serious studies. A contemporary student, whose evidence was taken during the process of his beatification, stated "that de Rossi, although the youngest amongst us, and a secular, excelled us all in diligence and success in his work. In the lists still preserved in the Roman College, of the attendance of the scholars and their progress, his name is remarkable for extraordinary punctuality, good conduct, and diligence, in which qualities he surpassed us all."

Then came his study of philosophy, and here again he triumphed. No one entered so well into the professor's explanations, and no one could so well point out in his turn that which had been taught. At the end of the course he was singled out to defend publicly certain theses, according to the custom of the college. This took place before a large number of spectators of high rank, and, according to Gaëtano Ridolfi, who was present, he fulfilled the task with such ability and clearness, and yet with such modesty, that the applause given him was universal.

His conduct deserved as much praise as his studies. Strange to say, this boy, though so humble and reserved,

obtained such extraordinary influence over his companions that he exercised a real apostolate among them. In the process of his beatification, begun soon after his death, many of his schoolfellows came forward to testify that they owed to him whatever good there was in them.

We will adduce one more valuable testimony, that of Professor Contuccio Contucci, who, though struck with his pupil's evident superiority, still, to test it, subjected him to some rather severe trials on several occasions. But the boy, by his fidelity and obedience, came out triumphantly from the ordeal. This raised him greatly in the professor's esteem, and he made use of him to cure many little defects which, in spite of a strict discipline, had crept into the college among some of the students. John warmly seconded his efforts, and the professor attests "That he was a perfect model to his companions; and so strongly was his influence felt that I employed him as an auxiliary, both as regarded the lessons and the piety of the other students. He was perfectly modest, punctual, and exemplary in all ways. Thanks to him, I could feel at my ease with my class, without troubling myself or being anxious. . . . In fact, I held him in the highest esteem, and always compared him to St. Aloysius of Gonzaga."

At the same time there was nothing offensive in his superiority. He was so humble, so gentle, so winning in his manner, that when any student had gone astray through bad company or other causes, he always succeeded in winning him back to the right way, and that so delicately that no soreness was felt by the one in fault, only a deep affection for his loving monitor. He had two special

devotions at that time, one to our Lady, the other to St. Aloysius. He became a member of a little congregation in honour of Mary, named *La Scaletta*, and continually repeated the words which were the formula of admission: "I promise to serve you, and to do all in my power to make others love and serve you also." No one was more exact in attending the little meetings held every Sunday; no one listened more attentively to the pious exhortations given in the little sanctuary. He took advantage of all our Lady's feasts to receive the Holy Eucharist, when his companions remarked that his face was quite lighted up with fervour and love towards her whom he called "his Mother." Seeing his good dispositions, his superiors appointed him sacristan, and incredible were the pains he took to invent something fresh on the occasion of each succeeding feast. He held this post for fourteen years, long after he had left the college, and the Congregation are still very proud of being able to reckon him among their members for so many years.

Next to his devotion to the Blessed Virgin, John Baptist cherished the most tender devotion to St. Aloysius of Gonzaga. He was living in the very same house as the Saint. Tradition pointed out a host of little incidents which had occurred in the corridors which he passed through daily. De Rossi, not content with admiring his life, resolved to imitate him in every particular as far as he could. Two virtues were Aloysius' distinguishing characteristics,—purity and penance. We have already shown the intense love De Rossi had shown from a child to this first virtue. In his daily visit to the altar of the

Saint, John never ceased imploring of him the same grace, that he might have a heart as pure as his own. Every year he performed some extraordinary act of virtue on his feast. He was never weary of reading his life, and trying to induce all his friends to do the same, after his example. John became a model of modesty, whether in class or in the streets. Never was a light, or doubtful, or improper word heard from his lips. His first biographer, John Mary Toietti, who was his intimate friend, asserts that he never lost his baptismal innocence.

John Baptist had now finished his course of philosophy, and began with renewed ardour that of theology. In this science he found all that his heart and mind most desired, and his progress was rapid in proportion. One only person was dissatisfied, and that was John himself. He thought himself full of faults, and sought how he could best punish himself for them. Naturally of a joyous and expansive nature, he was always fearful of having sinned against charity, or spoken unadvisedly. A spiritual book, which he one day read, confirmed all his scruples, and was the cause of his having a terrible illness. Toietti on this subject writes: "In the same way as the sun, (St. Bernard says,) however good and necessary it may be, often works great mischief when not tempered by shade, so over-fervour among the young who are striving to arrive at perfection, when not tempered by prudence and discretion, generally produces the most lamentable consequences."

De Rossi in later life would often relate what had happened to him, so as to be a warning to others, especially when he saw any one disposed to indulge in ex-

aggregated penances. "Your duty," he would say, "is to have recourse to your confessors, to be entirely open with them, and to do nothing without their advice. Do not imitate my example; from having held my tongue when I ought to have spoken, and practised indiscreet austerities, I injured my health to that degree that I could not continue my studies. I was reduced to such a point that I was able to do nothing but read a chapter of the New Testament, and meditate a little. But," he added, "I must still bless Providence, who turned my imprudence to my profit; for if illness had not hindered my studies I might perhaps have fancied myself a learned and literary man."

To return to the fatal book de Rossi had got hold of. He read in it that penance was the only way to preserve purity of soul; that it was a most useful thing to mortify the tongue by not speaking, and the appetite by not eating more than was absolutely necessary, and especially by not drinking. The advice pleased him, and he set to work with immoderate zeal to carry it out. By not speaking he ran no risk of offending his neighbour, and by not drinking he would mortify that tongue which was the object of his fears. In vain those around him tried to find out the motive of such strange conduct: no one was let into his secret. He thought to enjoy thus perfect peace, and that in the continual silence he imposed on himself he could more easily lift up his heart to God. But by striving thus to purify his soul he weakened his health, and thoroughly exhausted his body.

One day that he was devoutly hearing Mass in the church of St. Ignatius, his strength failed him, and he fell on the floor of the church in a dead swoon. The sound of

his fall brought his companions round him, who thought he was dead. At last they found that his heart was still beating, though feebly. They tried every remedy, and at last he came to himself, and could be moved home, where, thanks to the remedies of the doctors, he partially recovered. But ever after his health was in a most lamentable state. From that hour he was subject to fits of a kind of epilepsy, which, as he grew older, increased in frequency, and caused him acute suffering. A complete transformation also had been effected in his personal appearance. His beautiful face had become pale and thin; his voice, which was clear and strong, was now weak and shrill; his stomach, which he had entirely ruined, could only bear the lightest food; and from time to time his state of health became so serious that he could not write half a dozen words without bringing on a return of his malady.

Was this, then, to be the end of the bright promise which his youth had given? No; only from henceforth his life became more heroic. Now that illness and constant suffering were to be his portion, a mysterious, supernatural life was to animate his fragile body, and would redouble the influence he already exercised over the souls of others. Profound mysteries of Divine Providence, which loves to make use of the weak things of this world to confound the things that are mighty! Like St. Bernard, and so many other saints, who roused whole nations, while their own lives hung on a thread, John Baptist de Rossi shows us what can be done, with the grace of God, by a man deprived, humanly speaking, of all external means of success.

## CHAPTER IV.

**John enters into the Congregation called "The Ristretti."**

WHAT WAS MEANT BY "THE RISTRETTI" IN THE ROMAN COLLEGE.—JOHN'S ZEAL FOR THE SANCTIFICATION OF HIS CO-DISCIPLES.—HIS VISITS TO THE HOSPITALS.—THE VENERABLE JOHN BAPTIST OF BURGUNDY BECOMES HIS FRIEND.

**I**F it be certain that the Society of Jesus receives special graces for the training of youth, it is equally proved that the formation of congregations is one of their most effectual methods. To group together such of the students as show the best dispositions, and to form them into a chosen phalanx, who fight more bravely collectively than singly,—such is the object of a congregation. At the same time it stimulates by example the other children who may be less well disposed. But no distinction is allowed which might rouse susceptibilities or awaken jealousies. The entrance is free to all, and a demand, backed up by good conduct, ensures admission at once. Now and then, at the appeal of some loved father, the members step aside silently from their companions; and whilst the ordinary run of students assist, according to rule, at the common practices of religion, the little congregationists, united in their chapel, recite certain special prayers, and listen to a brief discourse from their father director.

It was in the Roman College that these useful associa-

tions had their birth. From hence they spread to the other houses of the Society, all the students being filled with the same spirit. On the arrival of John Baptist at Rome they had been established in six hundred and twelve colleges and one hundred and fifty-seven day schools directed by Jesuit Fathers.

So great was the success of these congregations that Benedict XIV., who had himself felt their utility, exacted that they should be obligatory, and that all the students of the Roman College should assist at the Sunday meetings. Thus, losing their autonomy and the restriction of their numbers, the congregation changed its purpose, and though flourishing, did not attain the desired end. To remedy this the Fathers created what they called the “*Ristretti of the Twelve Apostles*,” which was divided into two bodies: the ordinary *ristretto*, into which young students were admitted, and the particular *ristretto*, chosen from the ordinary one, for the older and more serious students. Besides the “twelve apostles,” who were as the founders of the work, and who fulfilled all its important functions, the class admitted others of the like dispositions, and included honorary members among those who on leaving the college still wished to follow the exercises of the pious congregation. In this way John Baptist always continued a member of the *Ristretto of the Twelve Apostles*.\*

\* Father Gallazzi, writing to a new member of this congregation, who was away from Rome, and who wished to have its rules, thus drew them up for him:

1. The members must devote themselves to exercises of piety, and lead others to follow them by their words and example.



The wholesome influence exercised by John among the members of this congregation lasted all his life, for the ardour which he showed on being first admitted to the apostolate was never relaxed. Holy companions surrounded him on all sides. We have only to quote the names of J. B. Scafali, Joseph Grillotti, Dominic Seghetti, Francis Bacchiori, J. B. Valentini, Philip Taglieri, and

2. Every eight days they must come to the Sacraments. They should choose a wise confessor.

3. Every day they must make half or quarter of an hour's prayer and meditation, and a nightly examination of conscience.

4. They must practise some little penance, but only with the permission of their confessor. Friday the best day for this.

5. They must try and observe the *Fioretti*. (These were little sheets of paper, giving a virtue for each to practise, and which were drawn by lot.)

6. Accuse themselves of some fault, and ask for a penance. (This article is voluntary, and to observe it, permission must be asked, which is not always given.)

7. Never to talk of what has passed in the *ristretto*, even when one has left it.

8. Those whose conduct has not been satisfactory, and who have missed the meetings three times without good reason, will be expelled.

9. The members must love, help, and cheer each other, especially by visiting one another if sick.

10. They must obey the Father Director without question or reply.

11. They must read every day a spiritual book for a quarter of an hour.

12. They must not take part in any doubtful amusements, such as certain plays and public games.

13. In going and coming from the meetings of the *ristretto* a rigorous silence must be observed.

14. If one of the members happens to die, his companions must make three Communions for his intention, offer up fifteen days of good works for his soul, and say for him the Office of the Dead.

Besides this, three times a year we ascend the Scala Santa, once a year we make the pilgrimage of the Seven Churches, and every week we visit the hospitals.

(Extract from Letter from Father Galluzzi, still preserved in the library of the Roman Seminary, which was formerly the German College.)

many others, whose rare virtues were recorded by Father Galluzzi, and whose memory is still held in veneration. The Venerable du Tronchet was among the number, and the pious priest, Peter Mirré, who became the inseparable companion of St. Leonard of Port Maurice. The memory of that Saint, and of the Venerable Francis Tenderini, was equally dear to the young congregation.

Amidst this august company de Rossi was soon distinguished, and deserved the universal esteem and respect of his companions. In all important affairs Father Galluzzi did not fail to consult him, and he did it with as much deference as to a saint.

If John Baptist found a powerful help in the example of his companions, the rules furnished him with endless opportunities for exercising his zeal. Their director pointed out two special works of charity to the young members: in the college itself, the spiritual good of the students; in the city, the visit to the hospitals, and the care of the beggars, who then, as now, abounded in Rome.

De Rossi practised these counsels with such energy and love that he soon deserved the title given him of "The second St. Philip of Neri;" but his first entrance into the *ristretto* deserves mention.

As a faithful and devout servant of Mary, John often went to serve the Mass of a holy priest, Dom Gregory Oliva, in the church of St. Mary Major. Like all those who came in contact with the lad, Dom Gregory soon became a great admirer of the modesty and recollection of his young server. He found out that he was following the course of studies in the Roman College, and one day asked him if he had joined the *ristretto*, of which he was

himself a member. John replied that he knew nothing about it, and Dom Gregory drew so glowing a picture of the congregation that the boy at once offered himself for admission, and was accepted. Once enrolled among the apostles, his one idea was to increase the numbers of these generous young hearts; in fact, to procure the greatest amount of good for others was even then his dominant passion. Not content with striving to induce his companions to follow him, he would go to their parents, and try and persuade them to bring their children to join the congregation, thus following the example of St. Leonard of Port Maurice, who, having himself experienced the benefits of the *ristretto*, always strove to enlist all the fervent young Romans he knew in the association. On the days of the meetings he was always punctually waiting at the college door, and as the crowd of students passed out he would watch for one after the other, lest the members should forget the hour, and by a word, a smile, or a gesture, he would inspire the tepid, and give courage to the weak. After his death a picture of him was placed in this very spot, so that the students might look at it in passing, and be reminded of their devout and holy companion.

Then, as the clock struck, he would go into the meeting, always followed by a large crowd of congregationists, who were pleased to accompany him, and on whose smiling faces there was no constraint. The zeal that in others would have seemed ill-timed, was never misunderstood in his case, for they knew that he never preached what he did not himself practise. In spite of his influence over his companions, his humility was so great that even when

he was asked to give advice, he always dreaded giving a wrong one. Hence his anxiety to establish a mutual union of prayer, so that they might help each other, and that thus his "own weakness and insufficiency," as he said, might be compensated by the suffrages of his friends. He knew that, to some natures, serious things are not acceptable, and therefore determined to pick out all the interesting anecdotes and edifying stories he knew from the lives of saints or others, and write them in a little book, which he would lend to his companions, and let them copy what they liked. He would add a maxim or a saying of a saint to this collection, by way of impressing certain truths on their minds. And this habit he continued to the end of his life, so that at the conferences he gave to the priests of St. Gall he was careful to intersperse anecdotes of the like nature, which never failed to strike and interest his auditors.

Among the duties incumbent on the members, the first on the list was that of visiting the hospitals. John and his companions hastened consequently to the bedsides of the sick poor on every Thursday and feast day. From the time he was fourteen or fifteen these visits were John's great delight. He would console the patients in every possible way, distribute food and fruit, and encourage, soothe, and cheer them with real filial anxiety. But not content with caring for their bodies, he became a catechist to the ignorant, wept with those that wept, and those who were depressed and desponding he would contrive to amuse with the genuine gaiety of his nature, till they almost forgot their sufferings while listening to his words. The older he grew, the dearer this work became to him,

and with increased experience the good he effected in the hospitals was incalculable.

His charity towards his companions was equally remarkable. He never let fall a word which could wound any one's feelings, and when some of the students complained to him of each other, he would gently try to remove the bad impression, or if that failed, show by his silence how much he disapproved of angry words and recriminations. Any kind of deception or lying was abhorrent to him, and if anything were falsely stated in his presence he would gently but firmly reprove it, giving as his reason his dread of offending the Divine Majesty, the God of Truth.

Even in this world our Lord permitted him one great consolation, and that was the friendship of one like-minded to himself, the Venerable du Tronchet, to whom we have before alluded among the eminent students of the Roman College. We will here give a few details of the life of one who is too little known, and who was John Baptist's most intimate companion.

In the year 1700, in the little village of Billecut, in the parish of Val-de-Miège, and the archdiocese of Besançon, a little boy was born, called Claude Francis du Tronchet. He was the fifth child of one of the good old families in that county, and having early lost both parents, was brought up first by his maternal grandfather, and then by his uncle, Abraham du Tronchet, who gave him his first Latin lessons. At this time the inhabitants of Burgundy, and especially of Franche Comté, were very numerous at Rome. Many of the people, flying from the cruel invasions which ravaged their country, had turned their

steps towards the eternal city, so as to put themselves under the protection of the Sovereign Pontiffs. They were warmly received, and the church of St. Claude des Bourguignons became the centre which united these exiles from their native land. Everyone knew the skill and industry of these good emigrants in all mechanical arts, and they soon obtained almost exclusive work. Then the doors of the apostolic palace were opened to them, and they were chosen before all others to fill any vacant post. Proud of their reputation, the Burgundians did not forget the way to Rome. Every year witnessed the influx of fresh emigrants, who, having made their fortunes, would return to their native land. Peter, Claude, and Hubert, the elder brothers of young du Tronchet, had followed the stream, and established themselves in the eternal city. The first had become "*Cameriere segreto*" to the Pope Clement XI., who, hearing him speak of his young brother, invited him to come to Rome, promising him his protection for the future. Peter wrote to his uncle Abraham, and he gladly confided his nephew to the care of a certain Anatole Simon, a good man, who was just starting for Italy.

They performed the journey on foot. Later on, in the evidence given by Anatole before the Rector of Val-de-Miège, he speaks with emotion of the pious and edifying conduct of the youth during this journey.

In crossing the Mount St. Bernard he fell from such a height that they thought he had been killed. Again, in Tuscany, while he was crossing a rapid torrent on a rotten bridge, the plank gave way, and he was precipitated into the water below. "My Jesus! mercy!" he was heard to

exclaim when falling, and though he could not swim he was miraculously saved, and landed safe and sound on the bank when everybody had given him up for lost. God visibly protected His servant, in fact, throughout the journey. At Rome his brother Hubert, who was less busy than Peter, devoted himself to the care of the boy, and sent him to follow the course of study at the Roman College. This was in 1713. John Baptist de Rossi, who was older, had been a student there for more than two years. The two young men soon became great friends, their director, Father Galluzzi, being the link which at first brought them together. In the midst of the crowd of young students they were both models of virtue and piety. Both became members of the *ristretto*, of which they faithfully followed the rules, and a community of tastes and interests drew them continually together, whether at the meetings of the congregation or in the visits to the hospitals, where John Baptist de Rossi was already the loved guide and director of the rest. To his influence Claude attributed all the good he ever did, but, in truth, they helped each other on day by day in the path of perfection.

When he became eighteen, Claude determined to leave the world. Struck by the fervour of the Reformed Fathers of St. Bonaventura on the Palatine, he begged for admission among their order, and was at once accepted. Sent to the noviciate of Ponticelli in the Sabine, he received the religious habit on the 19th October, 1718. Being then attacked by fever, he returned to Rome, but in a lamentable state of health. He pronounced his vows the following year, and in spite of his continual sufferings was the

admiration and edification of the monastery. He was sent to Vicovaro to follow a course of philosophy, and then to various other houses of his Order; but no change of air had any effect in dispelling the fever, which rapidly undermined his strength. At last he received the priesthood at St. John Lateran's, on the 26th May, 1725. Pope Benedict XIII. ordained himself at the great ordinations of Pentecost, so that he gave Priest's Orders to the Venerable du Tronchet and John André Parisi, and on the 7th June, 1727, he did the same to him who became St. Paul of the Cross, and founded the Congregation of the Passionists.

After the first of these ordinations the young priests were admitted to kiss the feet of the holy Father, and when in his turn Claude Francis knelt before him, the Pope interrupted the previous silence, and exclaimed, "Hasten to become a saint."

On the 14th of June in that same year the young priest was sent to Naples. The voyage on the Tiber and by sea added to his sufferings, and when he arrived at the house of his Order he was carried to the infirmary, which he never again left. One of his countrymen came to see him. Claude received him with great affection, but conjured him to prepare for his death, which he said was near at hand, adding that he should follow him very soon. This young man was then in perfect health, but two months after he died, according to Claude's prophecy, blessing and thanking God for the salutary warning he had received.

But Claude himself was dying, in spite of the prayers offered up for him on all sides. In the midst of the greatest sufferings and spasms which seemed to strangle



him, he would go on repeating, "God loves me! God loves me!" On the 22nd of March, 1726, he slept in the Lord, holding tightly in his hand his Franciscan Rule, and exclaiming joyfully to those near him, "Adieu! we shall meet in heaven."

Death seemed to have no effect on this pure and holy body. His eyes were still bright and limpid, his cheeks fresh, his frame as flexible as in life. At first they had buried him in the common grave of the Order, where quick lime, mixed with the earth, decomposed the bodies in twenty-four hours. Then orders came for him to be taken out of the place of sepulchre, and to their great surprise the monks found that his body remained as life-like as when it was buried. At the post-mortem examination which followed, the doctors were amazed at the fragrance which was exhaled from the corpse. Five little wounds were found in the heart, and when the incision was made, although life had been extinct for three days, a torrent of blood, fresh and red, came from the wound. At the entreaty of the crowd the coffin was again opened, and every one could see the blood, and bear witness to the unchanged state of the body. In 1864, at the express order of Pius IX., the remains were solemnly attested and transported to Rome, with a phial containing his blood, and then placed in the monastery of St. Bonaventura, on the Palatine, where the early portion of his religious life had been spent. The cause of his beatification, introduced at Rome, is now being pushed forward.

Such was John Baptist's chosen friend, and such the reward which God had granted him. He had the joy of seeing Claude attaining to perfection in an incredibly short

time, and heard on all sides the merit attributed to himself, who had been his master and his guide in that blessed path. The inscription on his tomb is from the eloquent pen of Father Angelini, of the Society of Jesus.

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## CHAPTER V.

### John is ordained Priest.

HIS VOCATION TO THE ECCLESIASTICAL STATE.—HIS ORDINATION, AND HIS FIRST MASS.—THE RULES HE LAID DOWN FOR HIS CONDUCT.—HOW HE RECITED THE DIVINE OFFICE AND SAID MASS.—WHAT HE THOUGHT OF PRAYER.

JOHN BAPTIST was now sixteen ; it was time for him to choose a state of life. For some years, as we have seen, his father, Charles de Rossi, had been dead, leaving a widow and three children. The eldest son followed him to the grave soon after, and the poor mother was left with very small means to bring up her two girls. Human reasoning, family love, and even common gratitude, seemed to make it a duty for John to follow some profession, by which he could maintain his mother and sisters, of whom he was the only hope. He had never spoken to any one of his intentions, but for a long time he had felt himself called to embrace an ecclesiastical state. The earnest desire he felt to do everything in his power for the good of his neighbour, and particularly for the most miserable, and the zeal which devoured him, found no

sufficient outlet save in this entire sacrifice of himself. He allowed that circumstances demanded reflection on his part, but his hesitation did not last long: no human tie could stop him. Could he prefer the greater prosperity of his family to the salvation of so many souls, who were entirely abandoned? Would riches increase the happiness or virtue of his sisters? John thought not; and after mature consideration determined to consecrate himself to the service of God and of His poor. We shall see in the sequel whether, by setting aside worldly prudence to follow the call of God, he acted wisely or the reverse. But he did not come to this decision without earnest prayer, and without obtaining the prayers of all his friends; and then, by the advice of his director, Father Galluzzi, he announced his intention. His edifying life had probably prepared his mother for his determination; anyhow, she does not seem to have opposed it. At his request the Archbishop of Genoa, who was then Cardinal Fieschi, sent him the necessary permissions to receive holy orders. At once he left off his secular clothes, and in that same year was tonsured and received minor orders. It was then that he committed the imprudent mortifications of which we have spoken, and that his consequent sufferings began. But to compass his wish theological science was indispensable, and as, owing to his cruel illness, he could no longer follow the course in the Roman College, he tried to assist at the lessons given by the Dominicans at the Minerva. The celebrated Father Bordoni was then giving a commentary on the "Summa" of St. Thomas of Aquinas. John, in his feeble state, was obliged to content himself with listening to his explanations. But he showed later, by his

intimate knowledge of dogma and of holy writ, that these lectures had not been without their fruit.

We have no details as to his preparation for the diaconate. But that that day made the most profound impression upon him may be gathered from one of his sermons in 1758, (that is, thirty years after,) to the priests of St. Galla, in which he speaks of his happiness at that time, and relates a circumstance which had occurred in the retreat which preceded his ordination. While still earnestly prosecuting his studies for the priesthood, as far as his health allowed him, he never neglected the care of the poor. At last, on the 8th of March, 1721, his earnest wishes were fulfilled, and he received the priesthood. Being only twenty-two years of age he had to get a dispensation; but all that knew him felt that though young in years he had the experience and maturity of a far older man. The consecrating prelate could well apply to him the words of the pontifical, which were a *résumé* of his life: "Sit doctrina vestra spiritualis medicina populo Dei. Sit odor vitæ vestræ delectamentum Ecclesiæ Christi; ut prædicatione atque exemplo ædificetis domum, id est, familiam Dei."

We may judge of his fervour by the vow he made on that same day, a vow which was only known publicly after his death, and which he faithfully observed during his whole life. This was, never to accept any benefice, or any ecclesiastical dignity, unless compelled to do so by authority, and positively commanded by his director. This vow explains the profound aversion he always showed for honours, and the incredible love of poverty which he practised to its utmost limits.

He might, however, without any ambition have accepted one of those modest dignities so common in Rome, which would have placed him out of the reach of want, and enabled him likewise to increase his charities. But no; he was determined to be entirely detached from the world, and to break all the chains which might have bound him to it. Only the obedience which he paid to his director could ever make him change his purpose, and that for the sake of immolating his own will to the glory of God.

His devotion for St. Aloysius made him select his altar for his first Mass. Over the ashes of the saint in whose footsteps he was following, John Baptist performed this holy action with a fervour and a recollection which struck all the assistants, and which never was lessened during his whole future life. The little choir boy of Voltaggio, while growing in years, had never lost the angelic piety of his childhood; on the contrary, he grew in grace as in stature, and the oftener he drew near the altar the more his soul was filled with divine love.

He had now obtained the wish nearest his heart. He was a priest, with the mission to devote himself entirely to save souls; and God, who had given him the vocation, gave him also the necessary grace. This object became the motive of all his actions; he was never weary of dwelling on its importance. But to arrive at it a certain foundation was necessary, and that was, for the priest to conform his own conduct to his teaching. These are his first counsels to a young priest: "Take the utmost care to sanctify yourself, for without this we run the risk of being useless to the souls which are confided to us, and to

lose our own.”\* “A priest,” he would say, “is not merely called to ordinary perfection, but to the observance of the commandments in the smallest little details of every-day life; especially in his outward actions he should show what he is,—*Sacerdos alter Christus.*”

On another occasion, while explaining, as was his custom, the Gospel of the Sunday to the young priests of St. Gall, he said: “A young man drew near to our Lord one day, and asked Him what he was to do to inherit the kingdom of heaven. Our Lord pointed out the first method, to keep the commandments,—*serva mandata.* This answer satisfied the young man. Had he not always observed them?—‘*Omnia servavi a juventute mea.*’ But Jesus Christ exacts something more, and He replies, ‘If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and follow Me.’—(*Vade, vende omnia quæ habes, da pauperibus, et sequere me.*) At this proposal the young man retires grieved and discontented. The Gospel is silent regarding him, but some commentators think he was damned. Now, I am quite willing to believe that we try and keep the commandments: but that is not enough. We priests have a stricter obligation. God asks of us more than a simple observance, and by reason of our state we must apply ourselves to perfection in a more special manner. It is of no use for us to preach it to others if we do not attain to it ourselves. If we do not first of all sanctify ourselves, we shall produce no fruit in others.” . .

And again, on Sexagesima Sunday†: “In the Gospel of

\* Serm. I., 11 Aug., 1753; “On the business of our own salvation,”

† Serm. V., 9 Feb., 1753; “Necessity for our sanctification.”

to-day we read that the father of a family, having sown good seed in his field, the enemy came and sowed tares. The good grain signifies the word of God, which we sow in the hearts of our hearers. But what happens? Others come and sow tares, and very often these are sown, not by others, but by ourselves. Yes; we are ourselves the sowers of tares, when our works do not correspond with our preaching, or our actions with our words. In fact, how can we speak against defects and vices when we are ourselves, I do not say guilty in all points, but lax in our observance of contrary virtues? How can we reprove evil speaking and uncharitableness when we are so ready to reveal the faults of others? How reprove anger and irritability when we are so deficient in sweetness and patience? How can we find fault with those who neglect their duties if we are careless ourselves about our obligations to say the Divine Office, to celebrate holy Mass, to teach the catechism, and other priestly duties?"

With such sentiments as these we can easily conceive how generously he realized in his own person the high ideal he set before others. During his whole life the rules of the Council of Trent were the standard by which he judged himself, whether as regarded his exterior or interior conduct, his clothes, his occupations, and all the rest. He was very particular as to cleanliness, but at the same time wore simple and common stuffs. Like St. Francis of Sales, he had adopted the maxim of St. Bernard, that one should detest dirt and negligence in one's clothes as much as an appearance of vanity and coquetry. His dress was never of fine tissue or of expensive materials. When he was made canon, and he was compelled to have

a silk cassock, according to the rule, he would never wear it save in public functions. During the winter he used to be seen very early in the streets of Rome, with his hands violet and almost black with cold, to which he was very sensitive, and when implored to wear gloves, like other priests, he would reply, smiling, "No, no; let us content ourselves with what is absolutely necessary."

To the scrupulous simplicity, yet decency and tidiness, of his dress, were united a wonderful recollection and gravity of manner. He had a habit of walking with his eyes looking down, his modesty speaking of his constant union with God. Many, who only knew him by sight, would watch him as he passed by, with looks full of admiration and respect, and considered him as a saint. His way of acting was always inspired by supernatural motives. The necessity of living continually with people in the world, which to many secular priests is a great stumbling-block, became for him only another occasion of giving a good example, according to St. Paul's advice to Titus. In his relations with others he was careful never to show too much familiarity, for fear of lowering his sacerdotal character in the eyes of men, and of weakening by degrees his own good resolutions. Yet he always preserved the charm and sweetness which were natural to him, and which God so often made use of to touch the hearts of men.

He fled with a sort of terror from any intimate relations with women. If charity compelled him to meet them, either for the good of souls or for the service of God, he resigned himself to the necessity. But he made an inexorable rule, that they should never come to his own house. When he met one of them, to whom he was



obliged to speak for some reason, he maintained such a careful reserve in his manner that it was impossible to take a liberty with him, and he never would look any woman in the face. He used to tell his penitents that to act in this way was to pay them proper respect. His friends used laughingly to say that he never saw anything but the shoes of ladies.

While avoiding contact with the world as much as possible, he eagerly sought the company and conversation of holy ecclesiastics, for with them he felt he could without singularity speak of things of God. His companions always hailed his visits with joy, and parted from him with regret, for he was as charming and agreeable as he was edifying. They often said he was like another St. Philip of Neri in the simple gaiety and sweetness which attracted every one, and of which he made use to give a holy tone even to innocent diversion. He had a peculiar talent for bringing in pious thoughts in the form of amusing anecdotes in conversation. In one of his numberless missions, he was once the guest of Canon Prosper Bonacorsi, at Castel San Pietro. He was so charmed with John Baptist that he earnestly wished to have him constantly in his house, and would gladly have paid for his maintenance if he would have consented to live with him altogether.

One of his characteristics was an indefatigable energy in the employment of his time. Not a moment was left unoccupied. When not absorbed by works of charity, which generally filled every instant of his day, he would read and meditate on some passage in holy writ, so as to be thoroughly penetrated with its maxims. In consequence, his knowledge of the Scriptures was extraordinary,

and his sermons prove him to have been a most able, as well as profound commentator. If his health prevented his following other studies, God rewarded him by flooding him with light, and revealing to him what He frequently hides from the proud and learned.

His objection to attend any great dinners or feasts was well known. If almost constrained by some old friend to appear on such occasions, he would excuse himself in such gracious and touching words that people were afraid to press him any further. He always added that he really had not time.

But there are two points more on which we must say a few words, and that is on the two principal acts in a priest's life,—the celebration of holy Mass, and the recitation of the Divine Office. As an exact observer of the rubrics which the Church has drawn up for the recital of the Breviary, he never would omit one of them. Thus he never said Mass, as a young priest, without first reciting Matins and Lauds. Later on, when his charitable works absorbed him without a moment's respite, he invariably recited this part of the office the night before. For the other portions his hours were regularly and carefully fixed, for he said that as irregularity hindered a pious and fervent recital, so regularity helped his devotion. If, when the moment came, any visitor wished to prolong an agreeable conversation, he would rise and dismiss him, and that so graciously and civilly that no one could feel hurt; but he preferred depriving himself of any pleasure rather than break his resolution.

From the time of his ordination he had chosen certain models for imitation, like St. Francis of Sales, St. Philip

of Neri, and St. Vincent of Paul. St. Francis, when he was alone, used to say his office on his knees; and this custom was followed for many years by John Baptist, till increasing ill-health compelled him to give it up, or unless any other priest were with him who might have been troubled at so unusual a practice. If he said office in choir, it was remarked with what minute care he attended to all the ceremonies, even when age and infirmities made rising or standing a very painful action to him. To say the Divine Office was to unite himself more intimately with God, and so far from custom making him indifferent or tepid, he was compared very often to a seraph of love during that time, his hands being often raised piously towards heaven, while affective sighs burst from him, although he was himself unconscious of the fact. The Breviary produced in him the same effect as a meditation; and after both, his face was often quite illuminated, of which several persons gave evidence during the process of his beatification. A priest who, in 1763, went with him to St. Paul's outside the Walls, declared that when Canon de Rossi left him to say his Vespers, he watched him, and saw him the whole time so absorbed in God that he was as one raised above the earth.

But the great action of his day was the Holy Sacrifice. To it he consecrated his first thoughts, his most earnest care. Besides his hour's meditation, which he made every morning as soon as he was dressed, and often on his knees, he always strove to have half an hour's recollection before and after the sacred mysteries. Then, entirely absorbed in the thought of the great sacrifice he was about to offer, he never uttered a word. Nothing could distract him,

even if he had to wait a long time in the sacristy before vesting. The nearer he drew to the altar, the more his devotion became apparent. He celebrated at last with such fervour and emotion as to thrill through all who assisted at his Mass. In his humility he never spoke of the extraordinary graces he often received during the celebration, but it was impossible to conceal them altogether from his servers. Father Monzoni, S.J., declared that from the beginning of the Canon his face would be perfectly inflamed with divine love, and the same was remarked by Count Dominic Tenderini; who said that on one occasion he was so inundated with celestial joys after Mass that he exclaimed to him, "Let us fly from the crowd and from men. I feel God present in my heart; He speaks to me. It is too much!"

Another circumstance is attested by all who had the happiness of serving him on such occasions, and that was, that from the time of the Consecration to the Communion he was invariably seized with an inexplicable trembling, as if he were under the influence of some great fear. He was quite unconscious of it himself, and it never happened except during this part of the Holy Sacrifice. Canon Dominic d'Alexandris, speaking of this, writes: "I often assisted at his Mass, and I watched the celebration with extreme attention. From the Consecration to the Communion his face was simply on fire. A kind of violent trembling, (which he could not conceal from the servers,) came over his whole body, and often to such an extent that when he had to make the sign of the cross on the chalice and the holy Host I was always afraid of some accident, for his arms shook so much that he seemed often

on the point of upsetting the chalice. He had such an extreme reverence for our Lord under the eucharistic species that he was like the seraphim mentioned in holy writ, who tremble with holy fear before the throne of God. Never did I dare ask him the reason, and God permitted this, I believe, to spare him the pain of revealing the secret of his holiness, and perhaps because I did not deserve to understand the mystery of this trembling."

To complete the picture we have drawn of this young priest, we must speak of his love of prayer. John not only loved it, but declared that for a priest it was an absolute necessity. He writes: "One of the chief means of our salvation is perseverance in mental prayer. It is so powerful a one that I know of no other way of attaining to perfection. If we are proficient in that exercise we need never fear; but if we neglect it let us dread the consequences, for we run a great risk of losing our souls. *Qui non vadit ad orationem vadit ad tentationem.*" At all hazards John would win souls: but to do this we must be saints, and we can only attain to sanctity by prayer. On this subject he once said: "It is related in the life of St. Pascal Babylon that a certain great lord, having received a grave insult, would not pardon his enemy. Many persons tried to appease him, but in vain: their reasoning was useless. A Franciscan then tried to argue with him, but with no better success. Pascal, who had accompanied him to the door, and heard of his failure, declared that, ignorant as he was, he would himself speak to this proud man. He came back then, and simply said, 'My lord, pardon your enemy for the love of God;' and the proud man's heart was suddenly touched, and he freely forgave

his foe ; for Pascal had a heart all on fire with the love of God, owing to his fervent and frequent prayers."

The same thing happened to John himself, although his humility took care to conceal it.

A young man of noble family, who was studying at Rome, one day received a cruel and unjust corporal punishment from a religious. His anger was terrible : his pride had been cruelly wounded, and he nourished a profound hatred for this master, which he manifested in every possible way, to the great scandal of his neighbours. His friends and many persons of great merit had tried to soften him towards this injudicious master, and to bring about a reconciliation between them, but it was useless. John knew this young man, who loved and respected him, and after many years had passed, seeing that his anger and hatred were unabated, he resolved to see what he could do to bring him into a better frame of mind. One day he took him aside, and related to him this passage in the life of St. Pascal. Then, with a sudden inspiration he seized his arm, and exclaimed, "Well, do you also forgive the injury that was done to you, for the love of our dear Lord." The youth was conquered ; he reconciled himself entirely with his enemy, and in the end became a fervent religious. It was by so perfect a life that this young priest prepared himself for the great mission which was about to be entrusted to him.

# ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE ROSSI.

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## SECOND PART.

### His First Labours in the Ministry.

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#### CHAPTER I.

##### The beginning of his Ministry.

HIS FIRST WORK AFTER HIS ORDINATION.—THE CHARACTER OF HIS MISSION.—HE OCCUPIES HIMSELF WITH SHEPHERDS, PRISONERS, AND EXECUTIONERS.—HIS LOVE AND RESPECT FOR THE POOR.



IN WHAT WAY is a young priest, lost in the great city of Rome, to exercise the zeal which devours him? This question John Baptist frequently asked himself, and the same Providence which guided him from Voltaggio to Rome did not abandon him in this crisis of his life.

At first, weak and suffering as he was, he could not undertake any extraordinary work. His only aim was to continue, in silence and obscurity, the charitable care he had always taken of the poor and sick while in the Roman College. One of his characteristics, as his biographer and friend, Toietti, relates, was that all his

thoughts and labours were consecrated exclusively to the poorest and lowest classes. This was the only lot he was ambitious to obtain. He often said that the dregs of society were his predestined flock, and the only people who really belonged to him.\*

J. B. Nerucci, the Arch-priest of Castel-del-Piano, wrote: "Having lived the greater part of my life with Canon de Rossi, I should sum up all by saying that this holy priest seemed to have but one idea in this world, and that was to teach Christian maxims to the poorest and the most ignorant classes, and to bring back to the right path those who had wandered from it."

From the hour that the Man-God, to console and encourage the miserable, bore the greatest privations, appeared to the world as the son of a poor carpenter, and had not even where to lay His head, the Christian religion has raised a real throne for the working-man, by giving him the place of honour due to his toil and his sufferings. But this is not all. God raises up men whom He fills with His Spirit. Their life is consecrated to the poor outcasts, for whom they feel a species of divine love. They model their lives on that of our Saviour, who came to preach the Gospel to the poor.† John Baptist de Rossi followed thus in the steps of St. John of God, Blessed Peter Claver, St. Vincent of Paul, and many others. The same spirit animated them all, though diversified according to the wants of the men with whom they came in contact.

De Rossi began by devoting himself to the field la-

\* Il suo popolo eletto, di sua propria pertinenza.

† "Evangelizare pauperibus misit me."—St. Luke iv. 18.



bourers. The vast Roman Campagna, which at certain times of the year is silent and desolate, owing to the malaria which decimates its villages, is at other less dangerous seasons covered with flocks and herds, which have come down from the mountains, and the shepherds scattered through this kind of desert live part of the year alone, and entirely separated from other people. Their manners and appearance are wild in the extreme, and their ignorance complete. Little chapels have been built and opened by the care of the Popes in different localities, where these poor peasants can find occasional services. But to reach them they must go very long distances and abandon their flocks. Sometimes negligence came to redouble the difficulties of communication, and thus their religious duties were completely abandoned. A journey to Rome is the only distraction allowed them. They bring there from time to time the fruits of their industry, but have neither the time nor the means for any religious instruction. Certain quarters of the town are reserved for them, where they group together, and are little heeded by the Romans proper. Up to this day we see them gathered in the Piazza Montanara and other places, their only associates seeming to be the permanent inhabitants of the Campagna, who, with yellow faces dried up by fever, and half-closed eyes, appear far more miserable than the shepherds themselves. No one cares for them, and to some they seem positive objects of repulsion. For a long time John Baptist had watched these poor fellows with ever-increasing interest. No sooner was he made priest than he adopted them, as it were, as his children. They came into Rome at dawn of day or towards sunset. De

Rossi found out their favourite haunts, and was there at the same hours talking to them, showing the liveliest interest in all that concerned them, and winning their hearts by his genuine kindness and sympathy, and by his gaiety, which was catching. A mutual confidence was soon established between them, and John Baptist profited by it after a time to slip in a word here and there on eternal truths, to explain to them the commandments, and above all to prepare them to receive the sacraments. But the harvest was great, and one labourer could not suffice. Later on he found co-operators in the priests of St. Galla, who were destined to the same ministry, and who, with the grace of God, worked wonders among those neglected souls. Often, after he had talked to them, they would beg to come to confession; but John was not yet old enough for this part of a priest's duty, so he would joyfully carry them off with him to one of his holy old confessor friends, who always received them with kindness and gentleness. Very soon the shepherds and country people became warmly attached to him. If they met him anywhere in the streets of Rome they would at once come up to him and engage his attention. One day, in the Piazza of St. Peter's, he found a peasant whom he did not know, and at once entered into conversation with him, and at last persuaded him to make up his mind to go to his duties. John gave him the address of a neighbouring priest, but the peasant could not find him, and so gave up his good intention. John was in despair, and determined, as he said, to make amends for his fault. Though the heat was intolerable, it being the month of July, he never ceased wandering up and down the streets, till at last he

found his lost sheep, and took him himself this time to the confessor. D. Francis Ranucci, to whom generally John brought his penitents, gave evidence that the good he did among these poor people was simply miraculous. "These rough shepherds, plunged in ignorance and vice, would be so touched by his words that they would come to me in a perfect agony of compunction and remorse, and it was rarely that they fell back again into evil courses."

On another occasion, Mgr. John Francis Tenderini, having come to Rome to give a report of his diocese, invited his great friend, Dom Lawrence de Rossi, and the young John Baptist, to make a pilgrimage with him to St. Paul's outside the gates. They had got as far as the little chapel where St. Peter and St. Paul parted from each other before their martyrdom, when a man met them, evidently in an uncontrollable fury. He was striding towards the town, his eyes starting out of his head with passion, his hair standing on end, his clothes all in disorder. John quietly slipped away from his companions and drew near to the man, striving by a few kind and gentle words to soften and quiet him. At first they had no effect, but after a few minutes the Bishop and Dom Laurence, who were watching him from a distance, saw the man seize John's arm and burst into tears. It seemed that he was on the point of committing suicide by throwing himself into the Tiber, and he recognized in John the angel of God sent to deliver him from the claws of the devil. He revealed to the young priest the misery which was leading him to this desperate act. John consoled and encouraged him, and finally led him to a confessor, who gave peace to this troubled soul. He did not lose sight of

him till he was thoroughly calmed and resigned; and the poor fellow was at a loss how to express his gratitude. Soon after, he left Rome, and went to join some missionaries who were going to evangelize the heathen, and among whom he soon became distinguished for his zeal and fervour. Later on he was ordained priest, and on that occasion wrote a most grateful letter to John Baptist, whom he called his earthly saviour, and implored both his advice and his prayers.

But these were not his only conquests at that time. Prisoners likewise excited his warmest sympathy, and in spite of continual physical suffering, he would lavish every sort of care upon them, and exhaust himself completely in their service. A priest once was questioning the wisdom of the tender attentions he showed towards these convicts. "O! if I could only deliver them from the hell in their own hearts!" he replied. "When their souls are at peace they are willing to bear all their sufferings with patience, as an expiation for their sins."

When he could hear confessions he was still better able to help and console them. They looked upon him as a saint, and he won their love and esteem at once. His visits brought peace and joy to their souls; and when remorse threatened to lead them to despair, they would write and implore Father John Baptist to come and take pity upon them. They would not even go to their paschal duties without him.

He brought about several admirable reforms also in the administration of the prisons. One was, that in the women's wards men should not be admitted, but that persons of their own sex only should wait upon them;

another, that the chaplain might have access to the prisoners at any hour, even to those arrested on suspicion. Both applications were granted by the governor, who extended the latter permission, unasked, to himself. Great abuses had crept into the laws regarding vagabonds and beggars, and many of them were living in an abominable state of immorality. He persuaded them by degrees to accept his reforms, and induced a large proportion of them to marry, always contriving out of his slender resources to find money for their "dot."

But there were other men still lower in the social scale, because universally despised, and those were the public executioners. There was a noted man at that time in Rome occupying that hateful position. John became his adviser and his friend, and when age and infirmities compelled him to seek refuge in the hospital, John still followed and ministered to his wants. This man had a grave quarrel with his successor, which John contrived to settle; and meeting a priest-friend that day, joyfully exclaimed, "I have just concluded an important affair of state."

After the death of the old executioner he set himself to work to win his successor. What was the astonishment of the city when they found out that this hangman was leading the most edifying of lives! John had really converted him into an apostle, and this man was constantly bringing men and women to his confessional whom he had found steeped in vice, and who, by his persuasions and piety, had been led back into the right path. This became so frequent, that when John left the city on any business, he always pointed out some other priest whom he could

go and consult in his absence. Once he sent him to Dom James Severini, the curate of St. Venantius, and this priest received a whole tribe of penitents bearing a note of recommendation signed by the hangman. Mentioning these facts, that holy priest added: "In the soul of this man, despised, dreaded, and avoided by all, John had sown the seeds of such zeal and charity that he was a perfect marvel to us all."

In a word, all that were miserable, low, and degraded, found a friend and a father in the young priest. He was called "The apostle of the abandoned," and his motto might have been "*Evangelizare pauperibus misit me.*"

In the streets of Rome he was always surrounded by the lowest class of people; yet the rich and the wealthy sought him with equal eagerness. With his usual charity he would hear and console them in their troubles, but he almost invariably refused to be their confessor, lest he should be drawn away from those he called "*his dear poor.*" A Roman prince who had once been to his confessional implored him to become his director; but John steadily refused. "People of your rank and position," he said, "can find thousands of directors, but the poor and the despised have the utmost difficulty in securing the services of one."

Another time a lady of high rank pressed the matter so much that he did not know how to escape from her importunity, when it suddenly occurred to him to write to her, and tell her that "he was sure she would not like it to be said that she had the same director as the hangman, and that if she came to him that would certainly be the case."

The reputation which he had gained among the poor and abandoned extended itself, like that of the Curé d'Ars, to far distant countries. Often, when poor foreigners came to him, they would say, "We have heard of you in Portugal, or in Spain, or in Germany, or in France, and we come to you to be freed from our sins." This always touched John Baptist to the quick, and he would devote himself to these poor strangers with as much solicitude as if they had been his oldest penitents. His one motive in all this was his intense love for the poor; nay more, he esteemed and respected the state of poverty, as the saints have always done; and the words of our Lord to the just were ever present to him: "Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these My least brethren, you did it to Me." (St. Matt. xxv. 40.)

All poor people in his eyes were living images of our Lord, even more, *were Himself*. He could not endure the way in which they were despised and looked down upon, and often complained loudly of the unchristian spirit thus shown by many who called themselves good Catholics.

He insisted that respect should be shown to them, as well as kindness. One day he was walking with some gentlemen, when they met some beggars, who saluted John with grateful smiles, calling him their lord and master. John responded to their greeting with exquisite politeness, and then turning to his companions, said: "I assure you I am more pleased at receiving the welcome of these poor people than if it had been from a cardinal."

The name of "paupers" seemed to him intolerable. He used to call them the "little poor of Jesus Christ,"—

(*poveretti di Gesù Cristo.*) In the quarter of the town called "St. Galla" people objected very much to the crowd who came to take refuge in a kind of hospital he had founded, of which we shall presently speak, and called them "thieves and robbers," which used to cut him to the heart. Very often he could not interfere to prevent it; but one day he heard a servant using the same insulting language to these poor creatures, and calling him aside, he spoke so seriously to him of the respect due to poverty, and the contempt shown by his words towards those who represented our Lord Himself, that the man was thoroughly ashamed, and ever after treated the poor with kindness and consideration.

John seemed to feel the privations of his poor clients even more than they did themselves. One day he saw two or three of them more depressed than usual, and on inquiring the cause, found that they were about to be put in prison for a debt of eight dollars due for cakes. Instead of remonstrating at this singular extravagance on their part, he hastened to reassure them and pay the tradesman his bill, and then came back smiling, saying to those who were disposed to laugh at his proceedings: "Why should they not have their little pleasures too, as well as we?"

His patience was equally remarkable. One day, when John was walking through the streets of Rome with a canon friend, a man came up to him in a perfect fury, and said every sort of disagreeable thing. It was of no use answering him. John remained calm and silent. The man went on for a quarter of an hour, loading him with the most opprobrious epithets. The canon could hardly keep his temper; the passers-by stopped and wanted to



arrest him; but John begged of them to take no notice. At last, the man having apparently exhausted himself with his fury, slunk away, and John resumed the conversation with his friend at the point where they had left off, without making a single reflection on what had occurred. The canon, however, could not so easily forget it, and expressed himself in no measured terms. And then John took up the cause of the man who had thus insulted him, and spoke strongly of the numberless trials, and vexations, and privations of all sorts, which embittered the characters of the poor.

He often wished to live in the hospital at St. Galla, so as to be sure to die among his "dear poor," and be buried by them, and thus obtain their prayers, in which he had the greatest faith. Once, speaking to an intimate friend, he owned to having received very remarkable graces through their means, and he always felt sure of succeeding in an affair, however difficult, if his poor took a real interest and share in his intention.

Before starting on the missions he gave outside Rome, or in the convents, he would gather together his protégés, make them a little farewell speech, and ask them, before and after, to say a "*Hail Mary*" with him for the success of his work, and in the same spirit his favourite ejaculation was, "Mary, Mother of the poor, have mercy on me."

## CHAPTER II.

## John Baptist at St. Galla.

THE WORK OF ST. GALLA.—ITS COMMENCEMENT.—JOHN BAPTIST JOINS THE ASSOCIATION.—THE ZEAL WHICH HE SHOWS, AND THE TRIALS HE MEETS WITH.—HE BECOMES INTIMATE WITH THE VENERABLE JOHN ANDREW PARISI.

WE have reserved for a special chapter the account of the work to which John devoted himself from the time he was fifteen till the end of his life, and that was the hospital of St. Galla. It had been founded by another chosen soul, and that was a holy priest named Vaselli, of whom we will now give a short biography.

Jerome Vaselli was born of a humble but pious family living in Rome. After a holy childhood, he was admitted into the *Capranica* College, where he soon became a model to all the students. In 1693 he was unanimously declared to be the first in a public theological dispute held in that seminary, and again in 1696 he was chosen to pronounce the funeral panegyric on the founder. Already his burning love for the poor showed itself in a thousand ways, a love which was the offspring of his great piety and charity. Not having as yet any fixed outlet for his zeal, he began by teaching catechism on Sundays to such little children as he could collect in the church of SS. Celsus and Juliana, in the *Via dei Banchi*.

There, seeing one day a little fellow who was despised

by his companions, who, when he came in, would not make room for him, or let him sit by them, Jerome got up from his chair, and with winning sweetness placed the child in it, thus putting him in the place of honour before them all, to shame them for their unjust contempt of a boy because he was poor and ragged, and therefore, in Jerome's eyes, a fit representative of Jesus Christ. Then standing, he continued his explanations to the children as usual.

Another Sunday, after he had finished catechizing, he was going out of the church when he met a child miserably clothed. He asked him if he had been to the catechism. The child replied, "No; I belong to no parish." Vaselli inquired, and found to his sorrow that what the boy said was quite true; he was a stranger, and, like a great many others, had no settled home, and therefore no teaching of any sort. This made him determine to hunt out these little stray waifs, and gather them together every Wednesday at St. Saviour's *in Onda*, where he taught them the first rudiments of the faith. To induce them to come regularly he gave them each, at the end, a little bit of money. Their numbers increased, and several charitable people came forward to help him. But then there came a check. St. Saviour's had to be closed for repairs, and he could find no other place which would admit his dirty, ragged crew. Vaselli had followed the course of study at the Roman College, and been admitted into the *Ristretto* of the Twelve Apostles, of which we have spoken. In his distress, therefore, he hastened to consult the director of that work, Father Pompey de Benedictis. "You will do nothing," replied that Father, "until you have an inde-

pendent place of meeting for your poor children. Without that, from one moment to another, your efforts will be neutralized, and produce no results."

Vaselli, therefore, went on with his search. Not far from St. Maria *in Cosmedin* stands a chapel which has St. Galla for its patroness, that illustrious Roman matron, whose house had been on this very site, and where it was her custom every day to gather together twelve poor persons, whom she fed and served herself. In 1601, the Blessed John Leonardi founded his congregation of the "Regular Clerks of the Mother of God" in this church, which had been given him by Pope Clement VIII., and there he lived and died. Mark Antonio Odescalchi, a priest of the noble family of that name, then turned the house into a hospital for a thousand sick people, and became himself their servant. His great friend from his earliest childhood had been the Venerable Berti, a Canon of the Lateran, and, like himself, a student of the Roman College. He approved of his plan of finding an asylum for the multitude of poor who passed the night in the public squares or gardens, and no place seemed to him so suitable as St. Galla. In consequence, Cardinal Benedict Odescalchi made a petition to the Pope Alexander VII., who, in 1622, offered the Church of St. Maria *in Campitelli* to the Religious of the Mother of God, thus leaving the house of St. Galla free, so that the new work could at once be organized in it. Every evening Marc Antonio and Jerome Berti went out to hunt for these homeless wanderers, and brought them back to the beds they had made up for them.

Mark Antonio Odescalchi died in 1670, with the repu-

tation of a saint. Cardinal Odescalchi, who had become Pope under the title of Innocent XI., gave his powerful protection to the new establishment, and the Dukes Livio and Balthazar enlarged it. In 1702 the institution was directed by Dom Emilio Lami, and its administrator was Canon Testa, of St. Maria Maggiore. This canon used to come from time to time to give little instructions to the beggars, and Vaselli often accompanied him. On one of these occasions Vaselli told him of his distress about his ragged children. Testa at once spoke to Prince Odescalchi, and obtained leave from him to have the free use of the chapel for the meetings of the boys, so that Vaselli resumed his catechetical lectures there on the 25th May, 1702. Father Pompey de Benedictis was delighted at his success, and induced all the members of the "*Ristretto*" to help Vaselli. They persevered, and formed what was called "The Pious Union of Priests of St. Galla." To preserve their primitive Order, they only received members of the "*Ristretto*," or of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri. They had no superior, for Vaselli would often say, "Let our superior be our Lord Jesus Christ;" but respect and obedience were gladly given to him and to the older members. The associates would receive no recommendation to any dignities, for no human element was to interfere with their zeal and devotion, and the most complete disinterestedness was insisted upon.

Vaselli thought the moment was come to give extension to the work, and admit, not only children, but all the poor who sought for instruction. Later on, seconded by de Rossi, he established regular catechetical teaching at St. Peter's, in the Piazzas Barberini, Montanara and Colonna,

at the *Madonna dei monti*, and many other places. He even preached to the soldiers in the barracks, and to the sailors at anchor in the barges on the Ripa Grande, and no ridicule or blasphemy hindered his zeal. By degrees he gathered the sailors together in the church of "Our Lady of Good Voyages," which was set apart for this purpose. But at St. Galla he established, besides catechisms, the explanation of the Gospel on Sundays in very simple language, and on Saturdays they all recited the Rosary, after he had interested them with a variety of edifying stories. In 1721 Jerome Vaselli was appointed rector of the parish of St. Lorenzo *in Damaso*; but the care he took of his new parishioners did not make him neglect his poor outcasts. The moment he had a spare half hour he flew to St. Galla. Beloved by them all, and consoled by the happy result of his labours, and the conversion of innumerable sinners, he gave up his holy soul to God on the 20th March, 1742.

Father de Benedictis, who fully appreciated the vast importance of Vaselli's work, recommended it, on his deathbed, to Father Galluzzi, who was to succeed him in the direction of the *Ristretto*. Father Galluzzi, who knew the worth of John Baptist de Rossi, hastened to send him, in spite of his youth, to join Vaselli and his companions. "His was indeed a chosen soul," wrote Joseph Fuscaglia in his deposition, "and he poured out the treasures of his charity on the poor inmates of St. Galla without stint or measure. His continual thought was how he could best instruct the mowers, harvesters, shepherds, and all the country people, as well as the sick in the hospitals. Every evening he would join in the catechetical instruction given

to the lower classes, and holy and pious as were his companions, de Rossi was always looked upon as the first and best of these labourers in God's vineyard ; yet many of them died with the reputation of saints."

Dom Lawrence de Rossi, knowing well his nephew's great virtue, left him free to spend his time as he liked, and no sooner were his studies over than John would hasten to St. Galla. At first he only offered to do the humblest services, such as opening and shutting the doors, ringing the bell, placing the chairs, and the like, and his example in this respect was very useful as a stimulant to others, who afterwards never objected to the meanest offices which they had seen him fill with such joy. One of the customs was to go round the houses with a bell to summon the sick to the offices when they were well enough to attend, and John delighted in this, helping the lame, leading the blind, and persuading the careless and indifferent to accompany him. An ocular witness speaks of the great fatigues he daily underwent in going from one part of the city to the other, to give catechetical instructions, and adds, "that in his feeble and suffering state he must have died had he not been supernaturally supported."

Notwithstanding his devoted and disinterested labours for these poor people, he did not escape his share of persecution and ridicule. Many of them would laugh at and insult him, and say, blasphemously, "Leave us alone; will the sacraments give us bread to eat?" and some would even go to the length of striking him. John bore everything with that wonderful humility and patience we have before mentioned, and his way of receiving such unmerited

insults often resulted in the complete conversion of the very men who had abused and vilified him, and who would come a few days later with tears to implore his forgiveness. So far from bearing any resentment towards such, it was always remarked that John treated them with greater affection and kindness than any one else.

The clowns and tight-rope dancers were his bitterest enemies, especially when they saw the mob desert them to follow and listen to John's stories. Finding that squibs and ridicule had no effect upon him, they spread a report that he was secretly raising a troop of soldiers for a bad and hidden purpose. The credulous people believed them, and avoided John when he came near them as if he had the plague. In vain he asked the reason for their sudden mistrust. At last he found it out; but it was long before he could convince them of the falsehood and absurdity of the charge. In the end, however, the truth became apparent, and the poor joyfully returned to listen to their benefactor. This was in 1736. But it made a great impression on John, and twenty-three years after he spoke of it to the priests of St. Galla, to prevent their being discouraged, and to show them the value of patience and forbearance in dealing with human souls.\*

After Vaselli's death, John Baptist took his place. Like him, he had no official position, but became the director and the soul of the whole work. The Fathers of the Roman College sent him their best students to help him, and he took the greatest care of these young fellows, encouraging them in their devotion to the poor, and, in spite of his numberless occupations, contriving to make

\* Sermon VIII., 3rd August, 1759.



time to take them expeditions into the country, to the Villa Mattei or the Villa Doria, where he would throw himself into their interests and sports, and become a boy again for their sakes, while they, on their side, venerated him as a father and their best friend.

But even at St. Galla trials were not wanting. The prior of the hospital conceived a violent jealousy of de Rossi, and especially of the extraordinary influence he exercised over his companions. He was afraid lest this young priest should weaken his authority, and eventually take his place. We shall see later, at St. Maria in Cosmedin, a canon become, for the same reason, his bitterest enemy, and hinder his work in every possible way. John had but one arm, and that was patience and confidence in God. Without interrupting his ministry, he most carefully guarded himself from everything which could rouse distrust in the prior's mind, and treated him with the utmost respect and consideration. Such conduct, persevered in, in spite of continual provocations, at last opened the prior's eyes, and showed him his mistake. It is fair to add that he had the generosity to acknowledge his fault, and to repair it by becoming John's assistant in all his good works.

God rewarded de Rossi by giving him, as a friend and companion, the Venerable du Tronchet. If John, as the elder, guided him in the paths of abnegation and in love of the poor, du Tronchet helped de Rossi upwards by his admirable and heroic virtue. But there was another man with whom John became closely united, and who exercised a great influence on his future life, and that was

the Venerable John Andrew Parisi. We will give a slight sketch of his life.

His father, Cesar Parisi, was a poor sacristan in the church of *St. Cecilia in Trastevere*, whose care was to keep the lights continually burning over the tomb of the saint and martyr. Poor in this world's goods, he was yet rich in every virtue. God gave him seven children. Struck with the remarkable piety of the second, John Andrew, his father sent him to follow the course of studies of the Brothers of the Christian Doctrine, in the hopes of seeing him one day enter the Order of St. Francis, for which he had a profound veneration. Heaven blessed this family, and chose six of its members out of the seven, who were all consecrated to God. Three of the boys became priests, and one a Franciscan, whilst the three girls as nuns edified their communities by their virtues.

John Andrew, however, was the flower of the flock. He had begun to study Latin, and was getting on admirably, when the good father died suddenly, leaving his family in the greatest distress. His mother made him give up Latin, to study arithmetic, hoping to get him a clerkship in an office. It was impossible to surpass the goodness and piety of this child, but he needed a director, and this want was supplied by God. Every Sunday evening his mother took him and her other children to the church of "*Nostra Signora del buon Viaggio*," of which we have spoken, where Vaselli used to collect the poor Tiber boatmen, and give them catechism and Benediction. A secret sympathy drew John Andrew to Vaselli, and he implored him to hear his confession. Vaselli was equally en-

chanted with the piety and fervour of the boy, and he became his favourite child. Soon after, John Andrew was summoned to the office of the Monte di Pietà, to be examined as to his capabilities. But he found himself thrown with a set of young men of very loose principles, and their conversation shocked the pure mind of the child so much that he hastened home to his mother in tears, and implored her to give up her plan of placing him there. Vaselli, hearing all that had passed, and perceiving in the boy a very decided vocation for the ecclesiastical state, persuaded his mother to let him go on with his Latin, and offered to help in defraying the expenses of his education. He brought him to St. Galla, introduced him to John Baptist de Rossi, who gave him Latin lessons, and then sent him to follow his philosophical and theological course at the Minerva.

Parisi, as we have seen, had nothing. Vaselli got him named coadjutor to one of the canons of St. Mary Major, and Pope Benedict XIII. conferred priest's orders upon him at St. John Lateran's. Henceforth John Andrew only seemed to live to adore the Blessed Sacrament of the altar. He celebrated the holy mysteries with a super-human faith, devotion, and love. He was ravished into ecstasy very often during his thanksgiving, and remained for hours together immoveable, absorbed in God. His sacramental communion was not enough for him; often during the day he would make acts of spiritual communion. Even when he was a child he would do this with the other members of the family, and obtain wonderful graces in consequence. After his death several prayers were found, composed by him, which are really sublime expansions of

divine love. Vaselli read several of them in the pulpit to his audience, who were all melted to tears. In each an intense love of our Lord bursts forth.

"O, my God! how I love Thee!" he exclaimed. "I love Thee as a miser loves his treasure. Ah! yes; the miser is never content, nor I either. I have nothing more to ask, and yet all that I have received is not enough!"

In his long illness he was only deprived one day of Holy Communion, and even then they had to stop him as he was leaving his room to drag himself to the church, drawn on by a holy desire which was almost irresistible. But he felt the privation so terribly that he cried almost the whole day. Parisi at once felt the warmest affection for John Baptist, became his most intimate friend, and assisted him in all his good works; but he cared most for that ward in the hospital of St. Galla where they placed children with contagious diseases. He used to go there every morning and evening, and made those poor little children pious as angels and patient as little martyrs. There he brought about the conversion of several little Turks. He always begged to see them after they had been to Holy Communion, and without knowing their language he managed to make himself understood by them, which seemed quite inexplicable.

He was only thirty-four years old when symptoms of consumption developed themselves. He suffered for a year with admirable resignation, and died as the saints alone know how to die. His body rests at St. Cecilia in *Trastevere*, and numberless miracles have made it glorious.

## CHAPTER III.

The care John Baptist took of the young.

JOHN BAPTIST DEVOTES HIMSELF TO THE CARE OF THE YOUNG,  
LEADS THEM TO THE HOSPITALS, AND TRIES TO MAKE THEM  
LOVE AND PRACTISE EVERY VIRTUE.

THE care John Baptist took of the poor did not make him forget his old companions at the Roman College. Of this John Combi gives the following evidence: "From the time I was ten years old I heard every one speak with admiration of de Rossi, and I was myself a witness of the pains he took with the students at the Roman College, of which I was one. On holidays he would meet us at the hospital of 'Consolation,' as it was called, then walk to our Lady of Cerchi,\* where he used to sing litanies with us with wonderful fervour. Then he would take us into the cloisters of the Gregorian Fathers, and make us play at some amusing game, in which he joined as heartily as any of the boys. I used to look at him in wonder, and we all considered him as a young saint."

\* In this little isolated church de Rossi's portrait was afterwards placed, to keep up the remembrance of these walks. Under the portrait the following inscription is engraved: "Heio B. Joannes Baptista de Rossi ferialibus diebus lectiores adolescentulos e Collegio Romano Soc. Jesu post operam ægrotantibus in nosocomio commodatam ad virtutem et magnæ Dei Matris cultum hortabatur."

He was then thirty-two, and imitated in this, as in all else, St. Philip Neri, of whom he was a faithful disciple. We have already spoken of the care he took during his whole life to preserve the young from impure thoughts, and bad or dangerous company. It was with him a principle "That modesty, a watchful care over all the senses, and a habit of personal recollection, were the great means of preserving without stain the beautiful lily of purity from the withering blast of evil." He never would allow any doubtful games or caresses contrary to Christian modesty, and if he detected anything of the sort he would reprove the culprits with a severity which had all the more effect from its being so contrary to his usual sweet and gentle manner. Neither would he permit any sport which could wound the feelings of others. On one occasion, when the students were playing at a game of forfeits, one of the penances proposed by the leader was that they should all run and embrace a poor little humpbacked and deformed boy, who was their constant butt. No sooner said than done; the whole troop surrounded their victim, laughing at and kissing him, when suddenly John approached with heightened colour, and indignantly reproved the mover in this cruel sport and those who had shared in it. The lads, grieved to have so vexed one whom they looked up to as a father and a friend, instantly promised to abstain in future from a repetition of the offence.

Still more strongly did he feel about those coarse jokes and equivocal speeches which are current even in good society. He never failed to show his grave displeasure on such occasions, especially towards those who fancied they thus made their conversation more witty and agree-

able. Speaking to two ecclesiastics, who one day found fault with him for being too strict on this point, he quoted his own experience, and related, with great humility, that having once heard some light and improper conversation in the streets, his imagination was so impressed by it that he could not get rid of the recollection for a long while, nor without strenuous efforts banish the impure ideas from his mind. He dreaded also perilous intimacies and confidences between boys, in which very often short work was made with the reputation of others. One of his favourite sayings to them was, "*Be islands, but not peninsulas*;" by which he meant, Keep your independence in doing good, but do not become the slaves of any ill-regulated friendships. The venerable Bishop of Civita Castellana had confided his nephew to his care, Count Philip Tenderini, when he was obliged to leave Rome for his new bishopric. But when the young man was old enough to commence his higher studies in the Roman University, and go in for an examination in law and history, John persuaded the bishop to recall him, and make him study under his uncle's superintendence, giving as his reason that he could not answer for his purity among so many dangerous companions.

He dreaded also too much dissipation for young men, and disliked plays or theatres. Even beyond that, he would not take part in any of the great religious functions in Rome. "When the fête is at St. Mary Major's," he would say, "let us go and be recollected at St. Peter's; and when the fête is at St. Peter's, let us go to St. Mary Major's." Not that he disapproved in any way of those magnificent solemnities: on the contrary, he took great

pleasure in them; but he always feared that the excitement and distraction should lessen their piety. This explains why he never took his pupils to any public place of amusement. Once, during the carnival, while he still had the charge of the young Count Tenderini, that young man was bent upon going to a certain theatrical performance where men only were admitted. The canon tried to put the idea out of his head, but in vain. He then hesitated between two difficulties. Should he accompany him, and sanction by his presence an amusement of which he disapproved? or should he let him go alone, with the risk of his being thrown into bad, or at any rate doubtful company? He chose the former, and went to the play for the first and only time. His pupil watched him with astonishment, and afterwards stated, "That during the whole performance he never raised his eyes, either to look at the scenery or the actors. He certainly must have gained great merit by this act of self-denial and mortification, and by the violence he must have done to himself."

We have already spoken of his love and generosity towards the poor. He never could see any one in distress, without striving to relieve it. His uncle, the Canon Dom Lawrence, used often to complain bitterly that he never could keep any clothes but what he had on him. If he left off anything, or put it aside for repairs, John would be sure to lay hands upon it, and transfer it to one or other of his poor. He was always impressing on his pupils in their walks how they should see Jesus Christ Himself in their persons, so that they should neither despise their misery nor ridicule their infirmities. He made them feel that the greatest happiness here below was to relieve the



indigent, and that they could not spend their pocket-money better than by making some little sacrifice for this object. His words were so winning, and his example so powerful, that he persuaded a large proportion of them to do this, and thus procured for them a nobler and more durable joy than any passing gratification would have been to them. Young Tenderini, when speaking of this, writes: "If I ever had any money I carefully concealed it, that is, if I wanted it for any selfish object; for if my tutor had any suspicion of it, he never let me rest till my purse was empty, both to relieve the poor, and to prevent my making a bad use of it. It is almost impossible to give you an idea of the compassion he had for all who suffered. When he spoke of their needs, and implored the aid of those who had the means of helping them, his face would be all on fire, his eloquence had no limits, and one felt that charity was really with him a dominant and irresistible passion."

The devoted care thus taken by de Rossi of all the youths who were committed to his care brought forth blessed fruits. The children of whom he was the guardian and the guide became models of purity, piety, zeal, and self-denial. Towards the close of his life he was often stopped in the streets by men with tears in their eyes, who called him the "apostle of their youth," and reminding him of all the good he had done to them, they would implore his prayers for themselves and their families.

Nor did his work fail to create imitators. Up to this day we see groups of children walking with a zealous priest through the streets of Rome, listening to his stories, and often accompanying him to the Campagna or other

quiet places, where we see him joining in their games, and doing his utmost to win their hearts.

And when that priest returns wearied to his home, and he meets other neglected children already bearing the stamp of vice on their countenances, he remembers the innocent, joyous faces he has gathered round him that afternoon, and feels that by following in the footsteps of the Blessed John Baptist his labours have not been in vain.

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## CHAPTER IV.

John Baptist founds the Hospital of St. Louis.

JOHN SUBMITS HIS PLAN TO FATHER GALLUZZI.—FOUNDATION OF THE HOSPITAL.—THE DEATH OF FATHER GALLUZZI.—HIS ZEAL IN THE NEW WORK.—PETITION TO POPE CLEMENT XII.

UNTIL now John Baptist's energies had been mainly directed towards the instruction and relief of *men*, yet he felt that poor women were even more in need of shelter and protection. The evil was specially great in Rome. A great many of these unfortunate women, having no homes and no shelter, passed the night in the porticos of the public buildings and monuments, where they were exposed to the greatest dangers; but no one seemed to think of remedying the evil. At last John conceived a plan which he submitted to his beloved director, Father Galluzzi. Near St. Galla was a large building, also belonging to Prince Odescalchi, which he thought might be converted into a home for these poor outcasts. But the

rent was eighty dollars a year, and to make the building suitable for the purpose a large outlay would be required. Before beginning so important a work, Father Galluzzi told John he must have some days to think and pray over it, and that then he would let him know his opinion on the subject. John waited some little time, and then went back to the Jesuit Father for his decision. Father Galluzzi met him with a smile. "Courage," he exclaimed; "I have maturely considered your proposal, and approve of it. Here are five hundred dollars which I have received to give in alms; take them, hire the house you have chosen, and begin your work."

John was overjoyed; true, five hundred dollars, though a large and totally unexpected gift, were a small sum upon which to begin so serious an undertaking; but he had confidence in God. Prince Odescalchi, wishing to have his share in this good work, reduced the rent from eighty to sixty dollars, and John Baptist never failed, from 1731 to 1754, to pay this sum annually himself, which is still recorded in the register of that noble family.

Sixty beds and the indispensable furniture of the house soon exhausted John's slender resources, but by dint of begging and borrowing he went on as rapidly as possible with the furnishing of the home. Father Galluzzi wished him to undertake its management and become its director. But John, in his humility, entreated that it should be confided to a religious order, which, he said, would perpetuate the work and give it greater stability. Finally, Father Galluzzi himself was appointed superior by the council, and this charge was to pass to all the fathers in turn who should have the management of the *Ristretto*.

John would not even be elected a member of the council. In fact, the founder of the work contrived to hide himself in such complete obscurity, that when the brief of Pope Clement XII. appeared the following year, praising the institution, and speaking in magnificent terms of Father Galluzzi, no mention whatever is made of its originator, who had borne all the burden and toil of the undertaking. Father Galluzzi did not live to see this, the crowning point of the work, or rather he saw it in heaven. On the 19th August, 1731, he fell dangerously ill. In the midst of his sufferings his thoughts were continually recurring to the new house, but it made him unhappy that it should be still unopened and deeply in debt; still he had confidence in God, and continually repeated, "*Magna tamen spes est in bonitate Dei.*" He implored prayers of every one, and especially of John, that some generous person should be found to clear the home of its difficulties. His confidence was rewarded. Clement XII. heard of his distress, and at once sent him the sum required to clear off all the liabilities, announcing also the preparation of the brief of approval, which appeared a little later. A few days before his death Father Galluzzi, in conversation with the lawyer, Stephen Paliani, spoke of John Baptist and his labours, and then exclaimed, with tears in his eyes, "*John Baptist is a saint! indeed he is a saint!*" a magnificent testimony from so holy and devoted a man on the very threshold of eternity. On the 7th September this good Father gently breathed his last in the arms of his beloved disciple John. His death was a profound grief to all Rome, but especially to de Rossi, whose only consolation was the recollection of his great holiness and consequent assured happiness.

The rules of the home, or rather refuge, had been drawn up by John and Father Galluzzi together; they were short, but full of wisdom.

The internal administration was confided to three persons, the prioress and the sub-prioress, who lived in the house, and their man of business, who lodged outside, but close by. The prioress was to be a woman of a certain age, prudent, laborious, and of proved virtue. On her rested the care of the house, the finding of servants, the reception of the poor women, and the providing of all things necessary to their wants. In case of illness or absence, the sub-prioress was to take her place. Externally, besides the director, who was to nominate the prioress, (who was under his orders,) and to change her if necessary, there was a chaplain, who came every morning to say Mass and give them a short instruction. Two confessors were likewise attached to the house, and came two or three times a week to hear those who wished to come to the sacraments.

The home was intended solely as a night refuge. A bed was always ready for each new-comer. The house was only opened in the evening, and was closed in the morning, when the guests were gone. The preference was always given to young girls, and such pilgrims as could not be admitted into the *Trinita dei Pellegrini* for want of space. But no one was admitted except they came of their own free will. Manual work was forbidden, the house not being a workshop; also, no meals were served separately, to prevent confusion and disorder, but to those who needed it a good meal was given before they went to bed, but only after the doors had been closed for the night. This

last rule was to ensure their coming in in proper time, and also to prevent the women coming in to supper and going out afterwards. If they were sick they were not taken care of in the refuge, but removed to a hospital, for hospitals were plentiful in Rome; only this kind of night refuge was wanting.

At last, after many vexatious delays, the home was opened on the 8th December, 1731, under the patronage of Mary Immaculate and St. Aloysius of Gonzaga. The successor of Father Galluzzi, Father Belcredi, was its first director. The great difficulty was to find a man as chaplain, who would devote himself to the service of these poor, ignorant, repulsive women, or who had sufficient patience and tact to deal with them. This man was found in John Baptist. There was no honour in the position, but great fatigue, and much good to be done, so John accepted it with joy. Every morning he was seen, in spite of his sufferings, dragging himself to the refuge to say Mass and to speak to the inmates. He generally gave them a few very simple words on the elementary truths of our holy religion, or on the meaning of the sacraments. His extreme gentleness and sweetness, and the clearness of his language, at once attracted these poor women, who listened eagerly to his words. His gravity and reserve with them were equally impressive. It was said that in spite of the extraordinary conversions which were the result of his system of teaching, he never knew one of the faces of the women by sight.

Sometimes, however, there were horrible characters in the refuge, who refused to listen to him, and went so far as to insult him in every possible way. But nothing ruffled

his unalterable patience, and very often some extraordinary miracles of grace were his reward. For many years John continued in his daily care of, and duties to, the refuge, till failing health and increased occupations compelled him to give up the daily Mass into other hands. But this work was ever dear to his heart; his visits never ceased; and for twenty-three years, by his encouragement and advice, and continual begging for the wants of the house, he continued, as he had ever been, its real father and protector.

In his deposition on this subject, Dom John Mosca mentions the following incident:

“I met one day a very beautiful girl whom want and misery had driven into sin, and who had become the mistress of a well-known nobleman. Thinking that she was in good dispositions and anxious to lead a new life, I took her to Canon de Rossi. He knew that poverty was often the cause of these falls, and began by assuring her that he would secure her the means of subsistence. He then told me to take her to the home, and to recommend her specially to the care of the prioress, saying that he himself would be answerable for the expenses of her keep. He came to see her the next day, and at once became deeply interested in her case. The girl at first seemed touched and grateful, but after a time, as so often happens with those poor creatures, she could not stand the confinement and monotony of the life, and left to regain her liberty. The canon was so deeply grieved at this that one would have thought he had lost what he had most dear in the world, and always attributed this failure to his own unworthiness.”

St. Aloysius had been made the patron of the house,

and became its powerful protector. When first opened, the poor mistrusted it, and for some weeks only one little girl came to take shelter within its walls. The members of the "*Ristretto*" made a novena to St. Aloysius, and very soon the number of applicants for admission greatly exceeded the number of beds. Later on it was found difficult to get them to leave in the morning, as they found themselves so happy and comfortable. In 1732 it became absolutely necessary to increase the number of the beds; but money was wanting; the last penny had been spent in buying some linen for the sheets. But the prioress set to work cutting them out and making them, full of hope and confidence in the providence of God. They had only been able to buy a small portion of linen, yet it seemed to multiply in their hands, and at last Father Belcredi insisted on their measuring what had been made, when two hundred extra yards were discovered. In this, as in a thousand other ways, the prayers of the pious founder were heard and answered, and the work prospered beyond all expectation.

But no sooner was one charity organized than another suggested itself to John's loving heart, and now that he had provided a refuge against temptation in this home for girls who had not fallen into evil courses, he set to work to devise some means for reclaiming those who had. At last, in 1732, John drew up a petition to the Pope Clement XII., which he persuaded the most influential people in Rome to sign, and of which we will give the text. First, he begs pardon for daring, in his humble position, to address the Vicar of Jesus Christ, but his motives must be



his excuse, and also the well-known generosity of the holy Father in helping all good works. Then he continues:

“Throwing myself at your Holiness’s feet, I venture to call your attention to a terrible evil which has invaded Rome, and to point out a remedy. There exist in this city a great number of undisciplined, vicious, and shameless women, who find themselves, after a life of sin, in a state of utter destitution. They are more ignorant of the first principles of faith than the humblest peasant. Their confessions, which are very rare, are all sacrilegious, for they do not choose to understand what repentance means. Their words are blasphemous; they pretend to believe in divine mercy, whereby they stifle any remorse of conscience; a few beads, or a lamp burnt on Saturdays before the Madonna, is sufficient, in their eyes, to efface a lifetime of iniquity.

“But the harm they do to others is incredible. To seduce the young and innocent is their trade; they seek out the most beautiful young women among the poorest classes; with diabolical skill they contrive to root out all natural modesty from their breasts, and never rest till they have made them regular prostitutes. By their horrible profession our youth is corrupted, and the best and noblest families are impoverished and degraded. Such is the life of these loathsome women, who either die in their infamous houses without priest or sacraments, or in a hospital, where they very rarely show any signs of repentance. On the countenances of these wretched creatures final impenitence is often clearly stamped, and the terrible punishment is awarded them of dying in their sins.

"Now, Innocent XII. built a House of Correction for young men who had fallen into evil courses; and what is desired by many zealous persons is a similar building where the agents of police could bring these wicked women. They would have separate cells, from whence they would be taken two or three times a day into a central hall. A priest chosen with special care for this work would then explain to them the meaning of the Catechism, the Gospels, and the Commandments of the Church; and the rest of the day would be employed in hard labour of various kinds in proportion to the heinousness of their crimes. In the same building should also be received the well-known street-walkers of Rome, the bad mothers who for the sake of gain drive their girls into sin, and others who in the public streets of our city pursue and molest the virtuous. They should be condemned to pass so many months in this house of correction, for the short imprisonments of a day or two, which they now occasionally incur, do not tend to their reformation. On the contrary, they come out worse than before. It is true that one prison of this sort would not be nearly sufficient for the unhappy numbers of these miserable women: but as in an ordinary prison only a few are punished as a warning to the rest, so the salutary fear of being shut up in this house of correction may cool the impudence and stop the licence of many others. If therefore, the evil is not altogether extirpated by these means, it would at any rate be greatly diminished."

John goes on to show how the necessary funds could be raised for this undertaking, both by taxing the guilty and making them work for their maintenance: he also thought that a collection might be made from house to house for

this object. Everything in the plan had been well weighed and carefully and wisely conceived, and the petition was favourably received by the Sovereign Pontiff. Very soon de Rossi had the happiness of seeing a building such as he desired prepared at Ripa Grande. His idea was carried out to the letter, and even now one can read on the front of the house the following inscription: "*Coercendæ Mulierum licentiæ et Criminibus Vindicandis.*"

No sooner was it opened than John was summoned to give proof of his indefatigable zeal and charity, by being appointed to give the instructions. It was hard work, and of course, not always successful: but on the whole the results were most encouraging. On the other hand, the fear on which he had reckoned did not fail to produce its effects: and before long a really remarkable change was perceived in the city.

Only a few years had elapsed, de Rossi was still a young priest, and yet he had done so much. God blessed with success all his efforts to save souls. Leading a hidden life, and unknown to most people in Rome, he was already a powerful element in helping on the good, encouraging the weak, and defeating the wicked. But his zeal was only equalled by his humility. He always kept himself in the back-ground, doing all the work, it is true, but contriving that the credit and the praise should be given to others. His only wish was to live in this obscurity, for which his bad health gave an excuse. It required unforeseen circumstances to compel him to come forward and make himself known. The poor sufferer had no thought of this, but God judged otherwise, for His own glory and for the good of souls.

## CHAPTER V.

John Baptist is forced to accept a Canonry.

DOM LAWRENCE APPOINTS JOHN HIS COADJUTOR.—THE DIFFICULTIES RAISED BY HIM.—HOW THE YOUNG CANON FULFILS HIS DUTIES.

FOURTEEN years had elapsed since John Baptist had been ordained priest. In spite of his physical sufferings, his zeal never grew cold, and amazed all those who knew him. The person who was most specially interested in his career was the old canon, Dom Lawrence, who was too happy to watch a ministry so blessed by God as that of his young relative. Not knowing of his resolve at his ordination to renounce, if it were possible, all honours and dignities, Dom Lawrence's great anxiety was to secure him a certainty for the future. He dreaded lest the day should come when his cousin would need the absolute necessities of life, besides having to give up his many good works for want of means. Old age rendered Dom Lawrence incapable of assisting regularly at the offices in choir, and his death, which he felt approaching, would leave John Baptist absolutely destitute. As Canon of St. Mary in Cosmedin, he determined, if it were possible, to appoint him as his coadjutor, with a certainty of succession. For this the consent of the chapter was needed. Dom Lawrence explained his views and wishes

on the subject, and the reputation of our saint was already so well established that his colleagues joyfully assented to the proposal, too glad to reckon so holy a man in their ranks.

Until then Dom Lawrence had kept his own counsel. He now, however, announced the decision of the chapter to John Baptist. To his great surprise, so far from being pleased and gratified, John protested that it was impossible for him to accept the canonry. All Dom Lawrence's hopes were dashed to the ground by this unexpected resistance. In vain all his friends tried to overcome his resolution; he remained inflexible. To one who pressed him more than the rest he replied, "I cannot consent in any way to accept this dignity, obtained, as it was, without my consent. Since the news was brought to me I can no longer rest, and if I should be forced to take it I think I shall die."

Dom Lawrence thought that humility was the cause of this refusal, and tried to set before him the solid reasons for his accepting the offered dignity. He represented to him his utter poverty, and how he was bound not to refuse the means of subsistence Providence had put in his way. "No," replied John; "the alms given for Masses will be enough for me to live upon." All Dom Lawrence's arguments were in vain; their mutual friends dreaded lest the kind old man should take offence, and that, under these grave circumstances, the interruption of their intimate relations would give rise to scandal. John Baptist's confessor at last ordered and insisted on his submission, and also that he should refrain from starting any fresh objections if Dom Lawrence made him his heir. John obeyed at once, but could not restrain his tears, and on

the 5th February, 1735, at the age of thirty-seven, he was publicly received by the whole chapter as coadjutor. The necessity of attending the offices in choir prevented his frequenting regularly the meetings of the "*Ristretto*" at the Roman College; but he never would give up being a member, and always tried to keep alive its spirit in the walks he frequently took with young men, to whom his conversation was always a subject of edification.

Soon after, Dom Lawrence was seized with apoplexy, and the stroke was so violent that it entirely changed his character. From being the kindest and gentlest of human beings, he became all at once most violent and tyrannical. His reason was gone, and no servant would stay with him or endure his eccentricities, while his fury at times was such that some dreadful catastrophe was apprehended. John Baptist alone remained faithful to him, listening respectfully to his ravings, and continuing to perform the most devoted and repugnant services, in spite of the violent and unjust treatment he received. The sick man accused him of being the cause of all his sufferings, and went so far as to strike him brutally, and throw all his medicines at his head, so that very often John came out of the room with face and body covered with blood. But he never uttered a word of complaint, and was always calm and resigned to whatever was God's will.

A second attack came on in 1737, after which his violence suddenly and entirely ceased. At the last moment he received Extreme Unction and the holy Viaticum with earnest faith, and died calm and happy in the arms of his beloved John Baptist, who did all in his power to prepare him for this last and terrible passage to eternity.

God evidently had permitted this trial for the perfecting of his patience.

The old canon had been a man of distinguished merit, and was much esteemed by the Venerable Tenderini, Bishop of Orta. This illustrious bishop was accustomed to write frequently to him, and consult him on all important affairs. After his death he wrote to John as follows: "Allow me, dear John Baptist, to continue with you a correspondence which was very dear to me. Thanks to you, my old friend will thus be ever present to my mind, and my heart will be able to recommend him continually to God."

From 1737 till 1739, when he died, Mgr. Tenderini wrote regularly to John Baptist, and never did anything without his advice.

On the death of Dom Lawrence, John was instantly appointed titular canon of the Basilica of St. Mary in Cosmedin, and not being allowed by his director to refuse it, he resolved most scrupulously to fulfil the duties it entailed, and especially the regular attendance at Divine Office in choir, and the perfect performance of church ceremonies in their most minute details. During the first few years of his canonry he never was once absent from the choir services, except on occasions of serious illness. Later on, when penitents flocked in such numbers to his confessional, the briefs of Clement XII. and Benedict IV. dispensed him from choir; but he never used this permission unless imperative calls in the confessional at the moment of the Divine Office prevented him.

By his modesty and recollection Toietti said "that he was like an angel prostrate before the throne of God."

The churches in Italy are not like ours; instead of the quiet and calm which characterizes our services, in Rome there is a continual movement, the crowd surging here and there, either to pray before the relics of saints, or to perform certain stated pilgrimages to different altars, so that the noise caused by this continual agitation involuntarily distracts the attention. But in spite of that, John was always recollected and calm, and his eyes, which were generally cast down, never seemed to see the people who passed and repassed him. His fellow canons used to watch him, and gave evidence that for twelve or fourteen years he was always the same; neither the great heats of summer nor the severe cold of winter ever seemed to affect him. This simple recollection and absorption in the duties which he was performing had a great effect on the others, and many, by his example, were induced to amend imperfections of this kind.

Strangers were equally struck by him. On one occasion, under the pontificate of Clement XII., the chapter of St. Mary in Cosmedin assisted as a body in a procession which was made from St. Peter's to the church of the Holy Ghost in *Sassia*, and the witnesses of this imposing function remarked "That Canon de Rossi assisted at it with such modesty and recollection that they all exclaimed, 'There is a saint!'" He was in fact looked upon as a model in all his actions. His voice, though so feeble from ill-health, never spared itself in psalmody. When necessary, on the contrary, he raised it so as to lead the rest, and avoid any possible confusion. Was he not addressing God, and could he fail to bear witness to the faith and love which burned in his soul?



With regard to the ceremonies of the Church he was not less careful. He became one of the great authorities on all liturgical questions, and the chapter unanimously elected him to fill the office of head sacristan in the church. The superintendence of everything connected with divine worship therefore devolved upon him. Omitting nothing which was ordered, inflexible in the observance of the rule, and without ostentation, his simple earnestness attracted all beholders. His beautiful and sympathetic countenance, in spite of its extreme pallor, and his dignified figure, notwithstanding its excessive thinness, gave a lustre to his devotion, which struck everybody. He was inexorable in all that concerned the purity and holiness of those who belonged to the service of God and His Church. One of the chaunters on a particular occasion had allowed himself to make use of certain improper gestures towards the man who preceded him. The scene had taken place in the procession which the choir was making from the sacristy to the high altar before a solemn office. It did not escape the watchful eye of Canon de Rossi, who, full of zeal for the honour of God's house, made him leave the ranks, and turned him out of the choir. In vain several of his colleagues, and especially Canon Chiari, whom he particularly esteemed, implored him to condone the offence, and to restore him to his office, for his voice was a beautiful one, and he was the mainstay of the choir. John was inflexible, and would not yield. "The respect due to God and to His house must be considered before everything," he replied. It was long, long after, and only at the sincere and hearty repentance of this man, that he at last consented to reinstate him.

The efforts made by John Baptist were not limited to himself or his church. He was devoured by a burning love for souls, and soon displayed in St. Mary in Cosmedin that zeal which he had shown in his earlier works, and which made him a real apostle to the whole neighbourhood.

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## CHAPTER VI.

The good done by John Baptist at St. Mary  
in Cosmedin.

JOHN COMES TO LIVE CLOSE TO ST. MARY IN COSMEDIN.—HIS  
DEVOTION TO THE MIRACULOUS PICTURE OF OUR LADY.—  
THE CROWDS WHO COME TO THE CHURCH, WHICH WAS FORMERLY  
DESERTED.

WHEN, in visiting the sanctuaries of Rome, a pilgrim goes to St. Paul beyond the walls, he is generally struck by a church he passes on his way, situated on a plot of ground between the Palatine and Aventine and the Tiber. This is the little basilica of St. Mary in Cosmedin, surmounted by its square and massive tower, pierced by narrow windows, and ornamented with porphyry slabs and fragments of ancient marbles. Advancing to the threshold of the façade, which was restored in 1718 by Cardinal Albani, you come to a graceful portico resting on white marble and granite columns, and see before you the circular Temple of Vesta, which retains its beautiful chiselled columns, rendered more delicate in appearance by

the heavy modern roof with which it is overloaded. To the right is the Temple of Fortune, now become the church of St. Mary of Egypt, and further on the curious edifice known under the name of *The House of the Tribune Rienzi*. The tower of St. George of Velabro is hidden under the modern buildings, which are themselves overshadowed by the tower of the capitol. Behind the Temple of Vesta flows the Tiber, which forms, below the bridge, the port of Ripa Grande, where small sailing ships can arrive from the Mediterranean. In the middle of the piazza stands a beautiful fountain, formed by two gigantic tritons bearing a marine shell, from whence the waters burst upwards and fall into a vast basin.

This basilica is one of the most ancient in Rome. In the third century St. Denis, Pope, built the church in honour of the Blessed Virgin. According to tradition it is fifty years anterior to St. John Lateran. St. Adrian I. embellished and enriched it in 772. It was then that it obtained the name of *Cosmedin*, from the Greek word *ornament*.

Several Popes lived near this church, which, being given in 1435 to the Benedictines of St. Paul, was made a collegiate church by Leo X., and a parish by St. Pius V.

The interior has three aisles. The columns and their different capitals all belonged to ancient temples. The pavement is magnificent; it is formed of fragments of precious marbles arranged in beautiful mosaic patterns. Under the high altar, which contains the body of St. Cyrilla, daughter of the Emperor Decius, is a fine crypt, which was only discovered in 1717.

Attached as he now was by such near ties to the basilica

of St. Mary in Cosmedin, de Rossi began to love it with all his heart, and without neglecting his other works, determined to devote himself to the care of his new flock with his usual zeal. His first anxiety was to come and live nearer to it. The comfortable house Dom Lawrence had left him at the Forum he considered far too good for a servant of the poor. As long as he lived there with Dom Lawrence he was content, but no sooner did he become its proprietor than he wished to leave it. The reason was easily found. "He wanted," he said, "to be able to assist more punctually at the offices in choir, and to say Mass every morning in the basilica, so as to give the faithful greater facilities for being present at the divine mysteries." Nobody, however, was deceived by this statement; it was, after all, but a poor excuse, for the Roman Forum is very near St. Mary in Cosmedin, and to get there you have only to cross the little *Forum boarium*.

Close to the church, from which it was only separated by a narrow court, was a wretched tumble-down house, which served as a wheat granary, the state of the rooms, from damp and neglect, being such that no one would take them. Besides that, the house was very unhealthy, a sort of muddy marsh close by keeping up the malaria. The windows would not shut, which made the rooms intolerably hot in summer and cold in winter. In fact, it would have been difficult in all Rome to find a more wretched and uncomfortable dwelling.

What, then, was the astonishment of the canons when John begged as a favour for leave to live there! They could not refuse the permission, though they did all they could to dissuade him. Quite delighted, the holy man had

two poor little rooms cleaned out, and put in some sort of decent repair; and leaving his comfortable house, came to settle himself in this miserable apartment. These rooms are now changed into chapels, and their primitive appearance has disappeared under the paintings and decorations of the faithful; yet, even so, they are anything but attractive. Here are kept many little things which belonged to the saint, and which were collected and placed there after his death.

Here also John passed nine years of his life, in spite of the continual illnesses which so unhealthy a residence entailed upon him. Later on it was only by urgent entreaties, and even commands, that he was persuaded to accept a more healthy lodging. He declared he only felt happy and at home in this wretched abode, which made him feel as a poor man with his beloved poor, his "own children," as he called them.

The first use John made of Dom Lawrence's fortune was to complete the necessary repairs in the basilica, adding likewise an organ, which was sadly needed, and giving a house in the Trastevere to the chapter for the maintenance of a good organist. At the same time he placed a large sum at their disposal for the gilding of the apse. He was always most eager for the decoration of God's house, and when there was a question of any extra expense being incurred of this sort by the chapter, he was ever the first to encourage and assist them.

But the material beauty of the fabric was still as nothing in John's eyes compared to the welfare of souls. To bring about this result he tried, among other things, to increase the love of his congregation towards the Blessed Virgin.

In his little basilica he had what the people looked upon as a miraculous picture, which became every day dearer to him. It is a painting in distemper, of the Greek style. There is a wonderful beauty and majesty in the face of our Lady. A well-known painter, Bonaventura Lamberti, wrote about it as follows ;

"The face seems to me to be painted from nature, if not from the actual person of the Blessed Virgin. It is enough to look at it to be struck with the extreme virginal majesty and maternal love of the expression. It would be impossible to find this in any other mortal figure, and the painter would strive in vain to imagine such a face, or work out a similar ideal except from nature."

Every one is agreed as to the antiquity of the picture. It is probably a good copy of one of the most ancient portraits of our Lady, and very likely dates from the time of St. Luke.

If the question as to the painter be unsolveable, there is no doubt of its being a real work of art. The Virgin is sitting. Over the blue mantle which covers her from head to foot lies a light white veil, which falls gracefully on her forehead. Her head is bent down towards the Infant Jesus, and she seems to be calling the faithful to His feet. With her right hand she is pointing to her Son ; with her left she is lovingly supporting Him. The august Infant, sitting on His Mother's knee, holds in one hand the globe, and with the other blesses the faithful. The rich gold ground, studded with flowers, of the background, reminds the beholders of the glories of heaven, and throws out to still greater advantage this simple and magnificent compo-

sition. A nimbus surrounds the Virgin's head, and a star shines on the left of her blue mantle.

Below the picture, and near her feet, is a little banner with this inscription in Greek: "To the Mother of God, ever Virgin." But this inscription has evidently been added, and is of a much later date.

This precious picture was brought to Rome in 726 by the Christians who fled from the persecutions of the iconoclast emperors, Leo the Isaurian and Constantine Copronymus. The Sovereign Pontiffs assigned the basilica of St. Mary in Cosmedin to these fugitive Greeks, and many miracles bear witness to the wisdom of the veneration paid to the picture by the Romans.

Canon de Rossi had a special affection for this Madonna. One of his friends, Canon Chiari, copied it for him, and John hung this copy in a conspicuous place in his own room, where night and morning he knelt and poured out to her the love which filled his soul. Seeing how much he valued this picture, Canon Chiari made another very small copy for him, which he had framed in a little silver reliquary, and John always wore this on his breast as a precious jewel. It was the only object in the world for which he seemed to have a real attachment.

But he was not content with honouring her himself; he wished all around him to do the same. He began with the canons, and proposed to them to sing her Litany after the Divine Office. So full of love and zeal were his words that the chapter joyfully assented, and this pious custom continues to this day.

There remained the people. The church was situated in such a solitary and out-of-the-way quarter that very few

attended the services. The Feast of the Nativity was the patronal feast of the basilica, and John determined to celebrate it with unusual pomp. He applied to Father Galluzzi, a pious Jesuit well-known in Rome, and got him to come and preach a novena previous to the feast. He even composed certain prayers to be said on the occasion, which are still publicly recited. After Father Galluzzi, other religious came, and attracted great crowds of hearers, till St. Mary in Cosmedin became one of the most frequented churches in the town. The chapter set an excellent example of punctuality in all the offices. The numberless colleges in Rome came to see and hear, and very soon the church became too small for the congregation. From the immense numbers of confessions and communions before each feast one would have imagined that a special mission was always going on. Had not Mary rewarded the efforts of her devoted client?

The canon used to give simple and clear explanations of the catechism before the great sermons, which attracted the poor in a special manner. Very often Mary brought him particular penitents, whom he was able to reconcile to God. On one occasion, a youth, who had long lived an evil life, went, more from curiosity than devotion perhaps, to join a pilgrimage which was being made to a Madonna outside Rome, called "The Virgin of Divine Love." His childhood's faith had not quite died out of his heart, and he felt himself strongly moved to go and throw himself at the feet of a priest he saw there; but shame kept him back: he rejected the grace and returned to Rome. In so doing, he passed by the Basilica of St. Mary in Cosmedin, and felt himself irresistibly compelled



to go in and kneel by the famous picture of which we have spoken. He looked round and found himself close to Canon de Rossi's confessional. He wished to rise and go away, but an unknown power kept him back. Then suddenly his eye fell on the sweet and smiling face of the canon, who was beckoning to him to come to him. The kind look and gesture melted the youth completely, and he went into the confessional. Encouraged by a few loving, paternal words, the lad opened his whole heart, made an admirable confession, and received absolution for all his sins. Then, rising, he went back to the holy picture, thanking Mary with all his heart for the inspiration she had given him, and full of gratitude towards the good priest to whose feet she had led him.

Nothing gave John Baptist so much joy as to see the church full. After only a few months this was effected. The previous solitude was replaced by an eager crowd, and people flocked in from all sides. This was the moment which John had eagerly waited for. He had gained the first point: the next and the most important was to maintain this interest, and so earnestly did he labour at all that tended to the common edification, and so attractive did he make both the services and the sermons, that month by month, and year by year, the church was thronged with a devout and earnest congregation, while the veneration to the miraculous picture daily increased. Great as were his goodness and gentleness towards his penitents and towards all good Christians, he yet could be stern and severe in reproving vice, as the following incident will show.

In the height of summer, a body of young men of the lowest class came to bathe in the fountain opposite the

basilica. Very often their coarse jokes and loud laughter attracted a crowd of lookers on. John was very much scandalized at this proceeding, and looked upon it as an outrage on the majesty of God, whose tabernacle was close at hand, and whose temple was profaned by their indecent cries. While he was considering what to do, four or five of them undressed in broad daylight, and prepared to enter naked into the basin. Filled with a holy zeal, John seized a long whip, and hastening towards the impudent bathers, administered to them a sound castigation. The young men, thoroughly ashamed, fled right and left, followed by the hisses of the crowd; and the scene was never again repeated.

A zeal of this kind was sure to provoke enemies, and God permitted the persecution of His servant in order thereby to increase his merit. One of his most active traducers was the sacristan of the basilica. He took every opportunity of insulting and wounding the saint. And as John's conduct was irreproachable in every respect, he had recourse to calumny, and invented every conceivable story to depreciate him and make him odious to his colleagues. Certain tales of this sort came to John's ears, and he had no difficulty in tracing them to their source.

But in spite of this he never showed the smallest ill-humour or irritation towards the man, but treated him with marked kindness. Often it happened that a word from him would have confounded and exposed his calumniator. But he preferred to suffer in silence. When, according to Roman custom, the canons distributed certain gratuities to the sacristans, John was always more generous towards him than the others.

We do not know if in the end the man recognized his evil doings, and was penitent or ashamed of them; but what we do know is the way John behaved towards his enemies and detractors, always returning good for evil. Such noble and generous conduct struck all his friends, and especially the faithful among his flock; and his zeal, united to his patience, became all the more powerful in procuring the salvation of souls, which was the only object of his ambition.

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## CHAPTER VII.

**John Baptist prepares himself to hear Confessions.**

THE VENERABLE TENDERINI PERSUADES JOHN BAPTIST TO HEAR CONFESSIONS.—HIS WONDERFUL FACILITY IN DOING SO, IN SPITE OF HIS SUFFERINGS.—HE PREPARES HIMSELF BY THE STUDY OF MORAL SCIENCE.—THE PERSECUTION HE UNDERWENT.

FOR a long time the friends and admirers of our saint had bitterly regretted that he would not hear confessions. However, the hour was at hand when his scruples were to be overcome. This was, as it were, a new phase in his life, and it was to be his glory and his crown in his missionary career. Mgr. Tenderini was the indirect cause of his yielding to their wishes. One day he said to him: "John, you are a brave soldier, and you fight valiantly for the salvation of your neighbours, but you need a sword. If you only knew how effectively one

defends oneself, and how one can save souls with the powerful weapon of confession !”

“I know it,” he replied, “and God knows how ardently I wish to possess this arm, but hitherto He has refused to give me health for it; yet no one knows what it costs me to send my poor people to distant confessors.”

What he said was true enough. His bad health, which made him incapable of any prolonged effort at attention, and the fearful headaches which were the result of any continued study or intellectual occupation, seemed to preclude all hope of his undertaking this laborious part of the ministry. He dreaded especially lest the grave charge imposed on all who undertake the care of consciences should in consequence be negligently or imperfectly performed by him, and this was a far more powerful motive than any physical pain or fatigue for his resignation to the will of God in this matter. He had, in fact, given up all hope of being able to hear confessions. His life for a long time had been one of continual suffering, and the daily and extraordinary labours he undertook often reduced him to a state of complete prostration. Very often life seemed all but extinct, but then, when all around thought him dying, the flickering flame of life would suddenly brighten up again, and by a sort of miracle he would regain his strength, though only for a time. In these critical moments the one wish of the doctors was to get him away from Rome, so as to force him to rest. God doubtless permitted these fearful attacks of illness in order to spread the example and virtues of His servant more and more widely, for they were the cause of his frequent absences from Rome and the innumerable number

of missions he preached in other places. Without these providential circumstances John certainly would never have left his poor. In 1739 an unusually severe illness brought him to the brink of the grave. His convalescence was necessarily slow and tedious, and quiet and fresh air were absolutely necessary for his recovery. Yielding at last to the entreaties of his friends and the orders of the doctors, John decided to go to Civita Castellana, where his greatest friend, Mgr. Tenderini, resided, and wrote to offer himself to pay him a visit. "Come, and come quickly," replied the pious bishop; "on my door is written, *Porta patet justis*." John, in fact, was received by him as an angel from heaven. His host was only too delighted to enjoy his society, and to propose him as a model to his clergy. But he also wished more than any one else to see him in the confessional. He spoke earnestly to him on the subject, and prayed with all his heart that God would grant this grace to his sick friend. John alleged the reasons we have before stated, but the Venerable Tenderini was determined he should make a trial, at any rate, and one day ordered him to go to the cathedral for this purpose. "Go," he exclaimed; "I delegate to you all the faculties of which I can dispose. To-day you will only hear one or two confessions, to-morrow you will hear more, and God will do the rest." Full of faith in his friend's words, John obeyed, and, strange to say, this occupation caused him less fatigue than any other; nay more, it seemed to rest him after his labours.

The holy bishop, full of joy, made John understand that God specially destined him for the direction of souls, as, against all human calculations, and evidently by a special

## HE PREPARES HIMSELF TO HEAR CONFESSIONS. 99

grace, this work, generally the heaviest in the ministry, was to him easy and light. The hour was therefore come when he could himself console his poor by placing them in the very arms of God. His good works would henceforth be crowned with complete success. Mgr. Tenderini was all-powerful with de Rossi, who loved and revered him as a living saint, and he had no trouble in persuading him to continue what he had so well begun.

His convalescence after this was rapid, and he came back to Rome; but a few months later he heard of the death of this holy bishop to his inexpressible grief. During his last days Mgr. Tenderini spoke constantly of John, whom he called a saint; and he left him, besides his "*cappa magna*," which John constantly wore, his watch, "in order," (as he wrote in his will,) "that, marking by this means his hours of prayer, he should not forget at the same time the soul of his friend."

Before asking for the necessary faculties at Rome, de Rossi's scrupulous conscience made him think it necessary to go through a fresh course of moral theology, and to consult the most learned and prudent confessors he could find upon all delicate and disputed questions. Once a week conferences are held by Roman ecclesiastics, where certain cases of conscience are exposed, examined, and solved by competent authorities, followed by a general discussion, in which all take part. Every Monday Cardinal Castelli presided at a second conference, with the same object in view. John never missed one of these meetings, and frequently joined in the discussions, submitting his doubts and bringing forward proofs. A priest who was constantly present on these occasions remarked:

“The resolutions proposed by Canon de Rossi were always so just and clear that they only needed the author’s quotations.”

At the Trinità dei Pellegrini it was the custom during meals to discuss a moral case, according to a rule followed in the Oratory of St. Philip Neri. Later on this was one of the attractions which led him to leave St. Mary in Cosmedin and establish himself at the Trinità. His devotion to St. Francis of Sales and St. Philip Neri increased daily. He was never weary of reading their lives, and became hourly more imbued with their spirit.

During the years he lived at St. Mary in Cosmedin he used to say Mass at a very early hour, for he never slept more than a short time; yet he never failed to make an hour’s meditation before Mass, so as to prepare himself worthily to celebrate the divine mysteries. Often in winter the sacristan would be late, and used to find the canon shivering with cold in the little court which separated his rooms from the sacristy. He would not go back to his own apartment, but waited with patience the convenience of this man, so as not to lose one moment of the time he consecrated to his poor.

His habits were well known, and the poor who flocked eagerly to his early Mass heard it as a preparation for their confession. No sooner was his thanksgiving over than he placed himself at their disposal. He took care that a number of Masses should be said without interruption at the altar next to his confessional, so that his penitents might have no difficulty in receiving Holy Communion. His colleagues were too glad to co-operate with him in that way, and those whom he had already brought back to

their duties always knew when and where to find him if in need of further counsel or advice.

The rest of the day he consecrated to hunting up souls who were either without a guide, or who were wandering from the right path. When he became more known whole troops of people would arrive at daybreak from the Campagna in order to get speech of the holy canon.

For some years he scrupulously left his confessional at the hours of choir; but then he found that many people, weary of waiting, left the basilica, and could not very often return. In this difficulty he consulted Mgr. John Bottari, the arch-priest of the church, who, after mature reflection, told John that he must get a dispensation from his choir duties, and devote himself entirely to the direction of souls. Clement XII. at once sent him the dispensation, and Benedict XIV. renewed it, with a magnificent allocation in praise of our saint. This high approbation calmed all John's scruples, whose only desire was to do what would most contribute to the glory of God and the good of souls. Besides, in acting thus he was submitting to authority, and the canon was always too delighted to obey. He yielded then with joy to the Pope's orders, not because he preferred the confessional to the choir, but because he thereby made an act of obedience.

This rescript of Clement XII. and the brief of Benedict XIV. were read in presence of the whole chapter. This was the signal for a fresh persecution of our saint. Among the canons was one who was extremely displeased at the dispensation. In his eyes it was a gross abuse, and he determined if possible to prevent its taking effect. This trial lasted a long time, and was the more painful to John



because he was obliged to have continual relations with this man. His name was Tosi, a narrow-minded man, with a horrible temper, which was aggravated by a serious malady. He considered John's conduct in this respect so iniquitous that he seemed to think all means were lawful to unmask what he called his hypocrisy. He abused him openly and to every one; he acted as a spy on all his actions, interpreting them always according to his jaundiced imagination. He pretended to shudder when he saw him in the confessional, and whenever he met him showered upon him every ridiculous epithet he could think of. "What is the use of your being in the confessional," (he would say,) "when your duty and the divine Will calls you to the choir? Truly such a beautiful conformity to the laws of the Church ought to make you singularly acceptable to God! Your pretended anxiety to draw round you a crowd of penitents during the Divine Office, under the specious pretext of hearing their confessions, so far from being a sign of zeal, is a mark of your insatiable vanity and pride."

At meetings of the chapter Canon Tosi would rise and vituperate John in every possible manner, while reproaching his colleagues for what he called "their fatal relaxation of the rule." Then, if others endeavoured to calm him, he would come back to his point, and renew his violent and unfounded accusations.

In this most painful occurrence what did our saint do? In vain had he tried to reason with his furious adversary, so that at last he remained perfectly silent, and endeavoured only to return good for evil. To the shameful accusations made before the whole chapter he never opened

his lips, and mastered every movement of anger or irritation. Generally, when he came back from these scenes he had a bad attack of fever. His other colleagues could not conceal their indignation, and had it not been for Canon de Rossi's extraordinary self-command and calmness, angry retorts would have been the result. But what his friends resented most was the serious effect on his health which was the result of this cruel persecution. Still, if any one dared speak before him against Canon Tosi he interrupted them at once, and always found something to say in his praise, trying to excuse his brutal conduct and violent language on the plea of his physical sufferings. This went on for some years. John then tried a new means of conciliation. He appointed a coadjutor, Dom John Cambirasi, who should take his place in choir when absolutely prevented by his other occupations, besides attending the chapter meetings and voting in his name. This step calmed his enemy a little, though it did not satisfy him, and when they met he abused him as much as ever.

Time passed on, and Canon Tosi fell dangerously ill, his state soon becoming hopeless. John hastened to his bedside, and showed him such genuine kindness and courtesy that his old adversary became thoroughly penitent and heartily ashamed of his past conduct. He humbly asked his pardon, and full of respect for one whom he had so cruelly outraged, he implored him to prepare him for the last dread passage. It is needless to say what edification was given to all by seeing John quietly install himself in the sick room, assisting him day and night with the utmost tenderness, and thus avenging the persecution he

had endured by leading his persecutor to the gates of heaven. His heroic patience was accepted by God, and obtained for the guilty man a deathbed full of penitence and peace.

It may be said that there is nothing very extraordinary in the facts we have mentioned, and that John's conduct was simply in conformity with the teaching and example of Jesus Christ. But which of us would have acted as nobly under similar circumstances? There are hardly any of us who have not to suffer some persecution, whether great or small. But do we bear it as courageously? Yet it was by such actions that Canon de Rossi arrived at so high a pitch of sanctity.

# ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE ROSSI.

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## THIRD PART.

### *The Apostolate exercised by the Saint.*

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#### CHAPTER I.

De Rossi comes to live at the Trinità dei Pellegrini.

HE LIVES IN HIS NEW HOUSE AS HE DID AT ST. MARY'S IN COSMEDIN.—HIS SPIRIT OF PRAYER.—HE ESTABLISHES THE WORK CALLED OF THE "FIENAROLI," AND RETREATS PREVIOUS TO PASCHAL DUTIES AND TO THE FEASTS OF ST. PETER AND ST. PAUL.—HE BECOMES THE ALMONER OF THE POLICE FORCE.



SAINT JOHN BAPTIST DE ROSSI

had for nine years left his comfortable house to live near St. Mary's in Cosmedin, in an unhealthy garret. His life differed in no way from that of the poor around him; his food was of the commonest and coarsest kind. The large fortune Dom Lawrence had left him had all been swallowed up in good works of various kinds, and the revenues of his canonry were in reality the revenues of the poor, as he kept such a miserable pittance for himself.

His delicate health was still further enfeebled by the bad air of the place where he lived, and by the great dampness of his miserable lodging. Suffering never cooled his zeal; but his state got worse from day to day. At last his friends became seriously alarmed; the veneration he inspired increased their fear of losing him, and finally they resolved to compel him to change his habitation.

Cardinal Antonmaria Erba, who was at the head of the Trinità dei Pellegrini, loved him tenderly. He offered him a chaplaincy in the hospital, and implored him to come and live there. John consulted his director, and finally yielded to his entreaties. But he would only consent to go as a guest who would pay the expenses of his maintenance, and not as a paid chaplain, as he was afraid of depriving some one else of that position. This change was a most fortunate one; his failing health at last received some care, and at any rate this great servant of God was not reduced to die of misery, which would have been indubitably his fate had he remained at St. Mary's in Cosmedin. Still he left it with great regret; the canons felt they were being deprived of the presence of a saint, and John promised, whenever he could, to come and see them, and join in the choir offices, especially on feast-days, a promise he scrupulously kept. For the last two years, as we have already mentioned, he had made Dom Gaëtan Cambirasi his coadjutor in the chapter; but soon after he had gone to the Trinità he gave him up the canonry itself, only reserving to himself a stall in the choir, and just enough to pay for his monthly board at the hospital.

The establishment which had just opened its doors to our saint was worthy to receive him. The Confraternity

of the Trinità dei Pellegrini was founded by St. Philip Neri in 1550. Its object was to receive the poor pilgrims who during the jubilees and great feasts arrived in Rome in large numbers, and could find no shelter. The Pope Paul IV. assigned to them the church of St. Benedict, which was rebuilt a little later, and given a new name. In the spacious buildings alongside five hundred pilgrims could be received, and met with a welcome worthy of the capital of the Christian world. If they were sick, or only convalescent, they were nursed with the tenderest care till their cure was completed. The only qualification for admission consisted in a certificate from the bishop or curate of the pilgrim's home, attesting that he or she was come on a pilgrimage to venerate the tomb of the holy apostles. The length of their stay was proportioned to the length of their journey. The highest personages in Rome formed part of this confraternity, and fulfilled all the duties of hospitality towards the pilgrims. Not only cardinals, but even the Popes, would come and wash the feet of the new comers.

This was the new home in which John was about to take up his abode. He found there the poor and the sick, and wished for nothing else. He had his poor little bits of furniture moved into the room which he had chosen, and which was a very humble one, with one narrow window looking into a court. Here he lived all the rest of his life, and here he gave up his holy soul to his Creator. This room has now been turned into a chapel. Here he spent the few moments which were not devoted to the service of his neighbours. He had no idea of ever taking any recreation, and if sometimes he would go in the evening to

the Villa Mattei, it was again from a pure motive of charity, as we shall see in the course of our history.

This little room was in fact a sort of sanctuary, in which he only went to pray. "Every morning," wrote Francis Quartironi, (one of the people employed in the hospital,) "the canon, after having said his rosary, made a meditation on the virtues of the saints. He made another meditation at night before going to bed. During the day, whenever he was alone in his room, he shut the door, and if I had to call him I always found him on his knees in prayer." If he was too tired to kneel he would stand, but never hardly sat down. According to Count Tenderini, when he was like this absorbed in prayer, his face was quite transfigured, and this sort of glory lasted some time afterwards, so as to strike any accidental visitor with astonishment and awe.

Dom Antonio della Giustizia, who lived with him for some time, relates "that he often heard him praying out loud, sometimes with sighs, but more often as if overflowing with joy;" so much so, that he frequently thought he was talking to some one in his room, but if he went in he found the saint was alone with God.

Dom Philip Bianchi, who was in the next room to his, used to hear him getting up very early in the morning and throw himself on his prie-dieu, where he would remain praying till the hour came for him to go down to the chapel to say his Mass.

It was through this continual prayer that John found such wonderful facility in speaking to people on spiritual subjects. He was continually recommending young priests to pray and meditate a good deal before preaching, adding,

"That it was only by that means that their words would bear fruit and persuade others."

Almost every evening John would say a few words to the poor. Even when his whole day had been incessantly employed in good works, his exhortations were always clear and to the point, as if he had made a careful preparation. The people listened to him with the greatest eagerness, and often he would end his short address with these words: "I got up into the pulpit without knowing what I should say to you to-night. God put the words into my mouth, and allowed me to give you these counsels, and I implore you to profit by them."

From the moment of his arrival, in fact, at the Trinità dei Pellegrini, John preached continually, and with the same fruit as at St. Mary in Cosmedin and at St. Galla.

Nothing would satisfy him when it was a question of saving souls, and his fertile charity was continually inventing and suggesting new schemes for doing good. His idea was to provide a remedy for every evil, and, if possible, to unite in the same good work those who were suffering from the like need. We will now mention three important undertakings which he started about this time.

During the months of May and June a new population, as it were, flocks into Rome, composed of poor inhabitants of distant country places. They come for haymaking, and are sure of finding work and good wages. They are called in Italy "*Fienaroli*." They live generally in wretched houses or caves on the flanks of the Esquiline, between the ancient Suburra and St. Mary Major. Others find shelter near St. Galla by the Tarpeian Rock, or at our Lady of Consolation. They are generally the poorest and



most neglected of all the inhabitants of the city, and so it is needless to say that John instantly turned his thoughts as to what was to be done for them. An experience of some years had convinced him of the profound ignorance of this nomad population. There were hardly any among them who understood the mysteries of the faith or the duties of a Christian, nor were their troubles softened by any hope of a better life hereafter. What was worse was, that many of these poor people came to the sacraments without any preparation or understanding of the great acts they were performing, but simply from a kind of superstition. But how was it possible to remedy this state of things? Overwhelmed with fatigue, these poor fellows never came home till late at night, too tired and exhausted to do anything but throw themselves on their wretched beds, not daring to steal five minutes from the sleep which was so needful for them, for at the earliest dawn they would have to return to the burning sun and hard work of the previous day. It was therefore hopeless to try and collect them together in any way, so that the only possible means of getting at them was to visit them one by one.

Night after night, accordingly, John used to crawl into their wretched hovels, and talk to them kindly and lovingly, while he never interrupted their different occupations. Some were already in bed, others eating their supper, while a few would sit down by him. They were always glad to see him, for he made himself quite one with them, talking first of their work and their homes, and then going on to speak of the greatness and mercy of God, of the sufferings of the Divine Redeemer of mankind, of the holiness and the use of the sacraments, and of the

happiness reserved for the just in a better and eternal life. This gentle but earnest voice, coming out of the dark, as it were, for there was hardly any light in their poor dwellings,—and he generally contrived to hide himself in a corner almost out of sight,—had a most marvellous effect on these wild, uncultured minds. They used to listen eagerly, hanging upon the words which fell from his lips, especially when he spoke of the magnificent promises of the Gospel, and the way to obtain their fulfilment. What surprised them still more was, that a man and a priest, unknown to them altogether, should so love them as to seek them out in this way, unrepelled by the dirt and misery of their surroundings.

John never wearied of this work. He seemed to forget all the fatigues of the day, and night after night renewed his apostolate, having but one thought,—how he could bring back these poor souls to God. It is impossible to describe the confidence and affection which arose in the hearts of these neglected *Fienaroli* from this devoted and disinterested service. Often these wretched holes and caves became like chapels, in which the poor fellows poured out their whole hearts to our saint, who heard their confessions, prepared them for a worthy participation in the sacraments, and then left them, thanking and blessing God, and shedding tears of joy. In the month of July these peasants returned to their country homes, keeping up precious memories of the saint who had taught them the way to heaven, proud of wearing a blessed medal, or an article of clothing, or any little thing he had given them before their departure. It was always a most touching sight to see them take leave of their benefactor, and to

hear them talking to one another of all the graces they had received from him. One, whose conscience had long burdened his life, had found pardon and peace. Another, a man of advanced age, had made his First Communion with the greatest fervour and joy. A third was promising to be always faithful in future to the God whom he had learned to know, and who had forgiven him a wild and sinful life. Many were touched to tears. The following year they would come to him at once and announce their return, ready and eager to receive his teaching, and to bring any fresh companions to know him too.

Later on, when he found the number of these souls increase, he appealed to St. Galla and to the *Ristretto* of the Twelve Apostles, and found many young men and earnest priests ready to accompany and assist him. At last this work became a recognized duty at St. Galla, and up to this day these pious exercises continue, under the title of the Mission of the "*Fienaroli*."

But this was only one of the works of our saint. He was not satisfied with the spiritual condition of the Romans themselves, and applied to Pope Benedict XIV. for authority to establish a solemn annual retreat in Rome, with a view to prepare the workmen and common artisans for the reception of the sacraments of penance and the Blessed Eucharist. The Pope at once acceded to the request of the zealous canon. The missions began the Fourth Sunday in Lent, and lasted eight days. Instead of sermons, John found it more useful to give simple explanations of the catechism and of the principal dogmas of the faith. The cardinal-vicar was charged to select the churches in which these missions should be given. As

long as our saint had strength to speak he was always chosen first among the preachers. After the rosary, and the acts of faith, hope, and charity, there followed these little lectures, and the ceremony ended with Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. It was like a great mission opened in every quarter of the town, and produced the most astonishing fruits. In spite of the simplicity of both the style and matter, whenever John preached, cardinals, prelates, and all the most distinguished men in Rome flocked to hear him. So great was his success that the people would shut their shops, and throng the churches to such an extent that no building was large enough to receive them. This plan of annual missions to the whole city has been continued to this day, and deserves all the gratitude of the Roman people towards our saint, even if he had never done anything else for their spiritual good.

Success is always encouraging. After the Lent retreats, John established others preparatory to the Feasts of St. Peter and St. Paul. It was not difficult to excite a devotion towards these two great saints in the eternal city, of which they are the principal patrons. These new retreats lasted eight days, and produced the same enthusiasm as the first. They spread all over the churches of Rome. Pope Pius IX. during his glorious pontificate greatly approved of and encouraged this devotion, and he saw it definitively established in all the principal churches in the city.

The reputation of our saint, and the success which always attended his works, did not fail to come to the ears of the Sovereign Pontiffs. Benedict XIV., amidst his numberless labours for the good of the Romans, resolved

to have some special instruction given to a class of men who had been hitherto much neglected, namely, the policemen and others employed in all the public offices and courts of justice.

For this purpose he sent for our saint, unfolded his plans, and charged him to carry them out. As, however, his health was always so bad, he gave him leave to delegate another in his place should illness incapacitate his attendance. The Church of the Five Wounds, in the *Via Giulia*, was fixed upon for these meetings, and every Friday these men were collected and came to listen to John's instructions. There was a great work to be done among these ignorant, and often rough and brutal men, so that his loving, apostolic heart was soon warmly interested in them. Before long he gained their complete confidence. Docile to his voice, a certain number began regularly to frequent the sacraments, while all came to him in any trouble or sorrow, especially if they fell ill or were in danger of death. Whenever John was compelled to send some priest in his place, he recommended them strongly to have no other aim or object than the glory of God and the good of souls, and especially forbade them to receive the smallest pecuniary return for their labours.

In all these varied works John proved himself to be a real apostle, and his zeal and love seemed only to increase with age. One day a friend congratulated him on the enormous amount of good he had been able to effect. His answer was, "You should rather pity me for seeing such fields for work which I cannot undertake. I would give anything now to gather together and instruct a class of men whom no one has thought of,—the grooms

and helpers in stables. But alas! I have no time, and I know no place where I could hold their meetings."

In fact, his thirst for souls was never satisfied, although his ingenious charity was always inventing new schemes for their salvation.

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## CHAPTER II.

### John Baptist in the Confessional.

HIS ZEAL IN HEARING CONFESSIONS.—HIS GREAT REVERENCE FOR THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE.—HIS IMPARTIALITY AND SWEETNESS TOWARDS HIS PENITENTS.—THE SUPERNATURAL LIGHTS GIVEN HIM BY GOD FOR THE DISCOVERY OF HIDDEN SINS.—THE WAY IN WHICH HE TOUCHED THE MOST HARDENED HEARTS, AND OBTAINED THE MOST WONDERFUL CHANGES IN MEN'S LIVES.

**A**FTER having hesitated so long before accepting the mission of hearing confessions, John devoted himself to it with indefatigable zeal. No physical sufferings stopped him. Like St. Philip Neri, his model, he never considered illness to be an obstacle, and when the doctors, alarmed for his life, strove to force him to leave his confessional, they had to compel him to leave Rome itself, for in that city day by day a compact crowd came to throw themselves at the feet of the saint, who never would refuse to hear them. Others saw how gravely this labour affected his health, but he seemed insensible to everything but the good of souls.

While he was at St. Mary in Cosmedin a painful tumour in his leg confined him to his bed. In despair at being unable to go to his penitents, he had a confessional arranged by the side of his couch, and there received, consoled, encouraged, and cured all the sick souls that came to him. His friends tried to dissuade him, but John would reply, "These poor men have come great distances to see me; who knows if they would be able to return another day?"

It was the same in giving missions or retreats. "That poor sick canon," wrote one of his companions, Dom Philip Liberti, "has more zeal and energy than the strongest amongst us. He is always the first in the confessional, and the last to leave it."

There were certain fixed hours for confessions, but as many of his penitents could not come at those times he was always at their service, no matter how inconvenient it might be. Every one was amazed at the ease with which he lent himself to this duty. It was only after a meal that his sufferings sometimes for an hour or so made it impossible. But by a special interposition of providence this time, which he always consecrated to visiting the sick in the hospital, was never wasted, for he was able to do with the sick what he could not do with those in health. He could even hear their confessions without extraordinary fatigue; and long experience proved the truth of this fact. Was it that God wished thus to reward his burning love for the poor? Be that as it may, there was no doubt that when a sick call came John had always strength to attend to it. His lameness and his frail health obliged him to lean upon a stick, and to walk far more slowly than he

wished. One of his friends, therefore, was very much surprised at meeting him one day in the Lungara flying rather than walking down the street. On his stopping him to express his amazement, John exclaimed, "Do not stop me; a dying man is waiting for me at St. Gallicano. God has given me this power for once, that I may be in time."

He never complained of the number of people who besieged his confessional, and detained him in it for such an unconscionable time; and when giving missions he would often force his companions to take a few minutes rest, but entreated them, in return, not to disturb him in his work, alleging that his own salvation depended upon it.

If ever he had to give up the care of souls for a time he was filled with a kind of terror, and used to declare he was a useless servant, unworthy of the priesthood. "I am stopped on my way to heaven," he would exclaim. He added one day to his friend, Dom Pomponi: "To tell you the truth, I did not at first know the right way to lead souls to God. But now I have found it out: it is the path of the confessional; one reaps such wonderful fruits from it."

Other priests, struck by his wonderful success in the tribunal of penance, asked him for his method; and he has left behind a short instruction written for a young confessor, in which we find all the principles which he so faithfully put into practice.

To begin with, he had the highest idea of the sacrament of penance, and therefore used the extremest prudence, so as to avoid any shadow of sacrilege. He insisted that no one in presenting himself to the priest should have any



other end in view than the reverent accomplishment of this great act. He made it an inviolable rule never to give any alms in the confessional. If his penitents began to beg of him, he replied : "In the confessional you should seek for nothing but the pardon of your faults. It is not the place where you should either ask for or receive material help. I will see you later." In Italy it is the custom among the poor to put out petitions setting forth their needs and imploring aid. Not only did he refuse to receive these petitions, but he would not hear the confessions of those who presented them. It was equally in vain that rich people came at that time to offer him either money for his poor or for Masses. He would joyfully fix some other hour to receive their gifts, but implored them in the confessional never to let their thoughts dwell on anything but the great duty they were performing, so as to strive to give them a deeper conviction of their own sinfulness, and the need of more perfect and real contrition for their faults.

"When I am fulfilling that sacred mission," he would say, "I would rather pass for a rude man without any manners, than to seem to have a shadow of attachment to things of earth."

One of the first rules he laid down in that memorandum of which we have been speaking was to avoid all partiality or distinction of persons, and to treat all his penitents alike, whatever might be their rank or position. As physician and consoler of all spiritual maladies, he only saw before him the suffering members of Jesus Christ. The wounds of each, were they not the same? Was he not the father of the poor as well as of the rich? Several

times, when a throng of poor people were waiting their turn round his confessional, some gentleman or lady of high rank would come, and their servant would draw near and beg him in a whisper to let his master or mistress pass before the rest. But the saint answered with that mixture of gentleness and authority which he knew so well how to assume: "I beg of you to ask your master to have the patience to wait for his turn. I am very sorry, but I can make no distinction of persons in the tribunal of penance." Or else: "If you are in so great a hurry ask leave of those poor people who have a right to pass before you, and to whom I cannot do this wrong. Their time is often more precious than yours."

But it was by his excessive sweetness and fatherly kindness and goodness that our saint gained the hearts of sinners. He never showed himself more loving, patient, and gentle than in the confessional. Not only did he induce them to follow his advice with confidence, but he filled their souls (when truly penitent,) with ineffable consolations. How often, touched by his loving words, great and hitherto obstinate and notorious sinners would come to him and own that they did not know how to begin their examination of a long life of sin. He used to encourage them by every means in his power, and then, by judicious questions, probe even to the very depths of these ulcerated souls, only to dress and heal their wounds the more effectually. In the hospital he had an extraordinary sympathy with the physical sufferings of the sick, which gained their hearts at once. He never hesitated to come close to them to hear their confessions, breathing their (often) pestilential breath, applying his

ear to their dying lips, and lest they should need him again, remaining with them during their agony, suggesting to them holy thoughts and aspirations, and receiving their last sigh. One day, in a miserable cellar, he found two wretched people dying of a contagious disease, and lying on the same pallet. They implored our saint to hear their confessions, but their heads were so close together that one could not speak without being heard by the other. What did he do? His zeal was not to be conquered. He scrambled up on the poor bed and laid himself down between the two dying men, and, by fastening himself as it were on to the lips of each, heard their confessions in turn, and remained with them to the end.

In spite of this superhuman self-abnegation, he met sometimes with hearts whom even his heroic charity could not touch. But their refusals to listen to him did not discourage him. These men were generally the poorest and lowest class of beggars, who had been taken into the hospital, but whose souls had been embittered by their previous misery, so that they hated not only the rich, but the good God who had allowed their misfortunes. If he failed in doing anything with them during their illness, he would induce them to remain on in the hospital, himself defraying the expense of their board, although to do so he often deprived himself of actual necessities. The days during which they thus lingered on in the hospital, always appeared to him as so much time gained, for he was always on the watch for a return of their souls to God, and felt that grace would have its hour, which, in fact, often happened. The one thing he dreaded most was an imperfect or sacrilegious confession, when men had

not the courage to overcome their shame and declare the whole truth to him whom God had sent to absolve them in His name. He would use every possible means to encourage them to speak openly, dwelling on the mercy and tenderness of God, and on the Blood of Jesus, which could wash away the most heinous sins. Sometimes men would be brought to him who were quite determined not to go to confession: but he almost invariably brought them round by his loving kindness and real sympathy, and they would afterwards rejoice at having listened to him and yielded to his earnest entreaties. Some men again, who, for forty or fifty years had been burdened with a secret sin which they had never dared confess, and so had committed sacrilege upon sacrilege, would be won by de Rossi so completely as to open their whole hearts to him, and lay down at his feet the heavy burden which would have led them to eternal damnation. It is certain, also, that he had a supernatural light for reading into men's souls. Dom Tiburtius Pomponi, Rector of the College at Zagarolo, and the celebrated lawyer Stephen Palliani, both give conclusive evidence on this point; and Canon Paolo Ranucci, the archpriest of Magliano, said, in speaking of several young men of loose morals, "He knew what had passed in their daily lives so exactly, that they were constantly reminded by him of sins they had forgotten."

But the story we are about to relate establishes this fact beyond a doubt.

In 1753, he was giving a mission in the territory of Tione. Dom John Mattei, rector of that parish, who was hearing confessions at the same time as our saint, saw a

man coming up to his confessional, a notorious sinner, who begged to make a general confession. Thinking that de Rossi would make a greater impression upon him than himself, he told him to go to the canon, who was hearing confessions in a small room alongside the church, where the penitents came in one by one. This was done to avoid the noise inseparable from a great crowd of people at a mission, which is as trying to the confessor as to the penitents themselves. The man accordingly came to this little room, but found that the crowd was so great that it was hopeless to attempt to get in. He was giving it up in despair, and had almost renounced the idea of going to confession at all, when the door opened, and the canon himself appeared, saying to the people: "Let this man pass who has been sent me by the rector." The man was extremely surprised, for he knew that de Rossi could only have known of his being there by some supernatural means, and he followed him instantly into the confessional. After it was over, he returned to the rector and gave an account of the scene, adding: "When I had made my confession, he asked me, twice over, if I remembered anything else. I replied 'No.' Then, placing his hand tenderly on my head, he conjured me to conceal nothing. I answered again 'that I could not recollect anything else,' which was true. He replied: 'And what you did twelve years ago, in such and such a place, (mentioning the details,) why have you not confessed that?' I remained stupefied—for I then remembered it all. To encourage me, he went into every particular of my sin, the place, the occasion, and the motive which had led me to commit it, just as if it had passed before his own eyes.

It is perfectly impossible that the canon could have heard these facts from anyone else, for they were known only to myself and God, and I had entirely forgotten them."

The rector made him realize what an additional grace this was from God, for which indeed the poor fellow was already most grateful, and sent him home humbled, but rejoicing.

In the evening the rector was dining with John and his companions, and curious to find out if really the canon had this supernatural power, he asked him "if he had ever been in such and such a country, or knew any one from those parts?" Both de Rossi and the other Fathers said "No," and did not even know the situation of the place, or any of the people. Dom John Mattei required no further evidence of the fact that these details were only known to de Rossi by divine revelation.

On another occasion John and his fellow-missioners were preaching at Rocca di Cambio, when a priest of the place, Dom Joseph Pietropoli, fell dangerously ill with *perniciosa* fever, which reduced him to the last extremity. He sent for our saint to hear his confession and assist him on his deathbed. The doctors said there was no hope whatever: the sick man spoke with difficulty; and every symptom seemed to presage the final and speedy end. To his great surprise, however, John gave him for a penance the obligation of going every day for a month to pray in a little chapel dedicated to our Lady, which was at some distance off. "But, father," exclaimed the dying man, "I can never comply with this order, for my hours are numbered." "Accept it without questioning, my brother," replied John; "I assure you you will be able to

accomplish it perfectly." The event justified his words. The sick priest recovered, and faithfully fulfilling his appointed penance, he was able to thank God for an entire and perfectly unexpected cure.

In another way also John performed prodigies, and that was in exciting contrition in the hearts of his penitents. It belongs to a confessor to touch the heart of a man who sees his state and understands it, but who, bound to the world by certain close ties, will not make the sacrifice which true contrition and repentance would exact. Here also the faith and love with which John spoke would produce the most extraordinary impression on the mind of his penitent. A priest related to Toietti what had happened to himself. He was preparing to receive the sub-diaconate, and had begged the canon to hear his general confession. After his confession John gave him some short and wise counsels, and added these words: "Courage! excite in yourself a spirit of true repentance, and ask pardon of our Lord of all your faults." He did not say more, but he said these few words in such a manner that, (as the priest himself wrote,) he felt within himself the most extraordinary compunction, and his tears flowed so abundantly that he could not speak. John waited a few moments, and then gave him absolution, suggesting to him several holy thoughts. But even then his emotion continued. "This intense feeling was not natural to me," continued the priest, "and must have been entirely due to the holy canon's prayers."

As we have already said, when he was obliged to keep to his bed, John improvised a confessional alongside, so as not to disappoint his penitents. Dom Antonio della

Giustizia, who had been appointed to nurse and watch over him, was in the next room, and used to hear his penitents making acts of contrition with such fervour that they were like St. Peter sobbing at our Saviour's feet. Very often, when they left, they would press his hand, and exclaim, "O, what a saint you have in your companion!" On one occasion, in 1750, John received a visit from a peasant living in a distant village, who had travelled for several days in order to come and pour out his troubles to the holy canon. The poor man had let a bad woman into his house, whom he could not get rid of. She had fallen in love with him, and entangled him in a net which he had not the strength to break through. John listened with patient sympathy and kindness, and then spoke to him in the strongest terms of the necessity of showing courage, and breaking through these shameful toils. His words had so powerful an effect on his penitent that he rose to his feet, rushed out of the house, returned to his village, drove out the woman, and came straight back to Rome without stopping, to receive absolution from our saint, and express his fervent gratitude.

Another time, a similar confession was made to him by a young Roman, under the diabolical influence of a woman, who, under the pretence of washing and mending his linen, came constantly to his house: and although he was thoroughly ashamed of the connection, he too had not the courage to get rid of her. Again and again he had been warned of his sin, but in vain. Our saint, however, was not discouraged, and the few words he spoke had a magical effect. The young man rushed off to her house, and came back to the canon bearing an immense packet of



linen, exclaiming, "Father, here are my clothes; I have carried off everything from that woman and now I am free." He received absolution, and never broke his promise of refusing to see her again.

It is incontestable that God in this way gave de Rossi an extraordinary gift for touching the hardest hearts and bringing them to repentance. This was so well known by his friends that they brought to him all their hopeless cases. Dom Nicolas Bonucci gave evidence of this, and said that on one occasion, when they were giving a mission together, a man was brought to Nicolas living in sin, whom he could do nothing with, and who only flew into a violent passion when he tried to reason with him. In despair Nicolas took him to de Rossi, who worked the miracle as usual by a few words. The man's whole life was changed from that instant, and he thanked Dom Bonucci most warmly for having introduced him to the holy canon. Nor were these extraordinary conversions fleeting or transitory. Dom John Baptist Capretti, a missionary, declared "That if any one ever made a general confession to Canon de Rossi, they not only reaped great profit, but were afterwards remarked for an entire change of life."

Dom Hilarion Cesarei, archpriest of the Pantheon, mentions the following fact. After a very disgraceful career, a certain man of my acquaintance had been obliged to leave home, his reputation being so terribly compromised. Some months later, meeting him in the streets of Rome, I thought it my duty to speak to him, and implore him to lead a more Christian life. But to my astonishment, I found him already entirely changed. He then told me that

having fallen very ill, he had been taken to the hospital where de Rossi was : that he had made a general confession to him, and that ever since, his only desire was to correspond to whatever was the will of God, and that he would willingly have accepted death as an atonement for his sins. Another time an old Neapolitan soldier came to Rome, and was received at St. Galla. He had led a wild and vicious life : but de Rossi took him in hand, and a tender piety took the place of his previous bad habits. He spent many years at St. Galla, and became a perfect model of devotion. When he was dying he was asked if he would not make another general confession. "I hope, by God's grace," he replied, "that I have not committed any grave sin since I fell at the feet of the holy Canon de Rossi."

John had also the gift of producing perfect peace in the souls of his penitents. Dom Ordani, chaplain of one of the Roman prisons, mentions that on one occasion a man condemned to death for homicide implored that Canon de Rossi should be sent for to prepare him for the terrible passage. John hastened to his cell, and the poor fellow, who had been in the greatest terror and agony of mind before, became thoroughly penitent, calm, and resigned to die. He even refused a pardon which he might have obtained ; saying that now he should die in the grace of God, while he might have been struck down in the midst of his crimes, or relapse into sin, and then be eternally damned.

From all these facts, we can well understand how great was the crowd that besieged his confessional wherever he went, not only of Romans, but of men from distant countries. One day a gentleman arrived at the "Trinità dei Pellegrini," and asked eagerly "if Canon de Rossi were

still there?" His great anxiety excited the curiosity of the porter, and he asked him what he wanted of him. His answer was: "I have come all the way from Sicily to see him. One of my fellow-countrymen came on a pilgrimage to Rome, and had the happiness of making a general confession to Canon de Rossi. He came back so thankful and happy that he has done nothing ever since but speak of his sanctity. I am very anxious to do the same thing, and have made the journey for no other object." It is needless to add that his wish was granted.

It was a curious thing that de Rossi always induced his penitents to accuse themselves of every fault they might have committed during a long life. He looked upon this as an essential condition to a true conversion, and he had such a wonderful intuition with regard to human souls that he constantly recalled past sins to them, which they had entirely forgotten. The picture was sad, may be, but might they not look upwards with confidence? God had awarded His pardon to faults generously owned; and a feeling of gratitude would be a powerful motive to keep honest and generous souls from falling back into the same sins. This was de Rossi's method, and in thus following his career we begin to understand the thought contained in the Church's prayer: "*Deus qui omnipotentiam tuam parcendo maxime et miserando manifestas.*"\*

By creation God brought man out of nothing. By pardon God softens the guilty soul, renews and transforms it, and converts it into a new creature. The whole

\* The Prayer for the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost.

life of de Rossi was an exemplification of this truth, and shows us the divine effects of that Almighty power of forgiveness in the tribunal of penance, of which he was so efficient a minister.

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## CHAPTER III.

### Preaching to the Poor.

JOHN BAPTIST'S GIFT OF PREACHING.—THE SOURCE FROM WHENCE HE DREW HIS INSPIRATION.—HIS SIMPLICITY AND FACILITY IN SPEAKING.—HIS ZEAL FOR THE FAITH.—THE WAY IN WHICH HIS WORDS LED THE POOR TO THE RECEPTION OF THE SACRAMENTS, AND FILLED THEM WITH HOPE IN GOD AND CONFIDENCE IN HIS DIVINE MERCY.—THE WONDERFUL RESULTS HE OBTAINED.

TO understand more fully de Rossi's mission towards the poor, let us contemplate the three distinct means which he used in dealing with them. He taught them by his sermons, healed their ulcerated souls in the tribunal of penance, and relieved their misery by copious alms. We have seen what he did in the confessional; let us now turn to the work he effected by his preaching.

Ever since the day when his imprudent austerities had brought on the serious malady we have before alluded to, his weak voice and his incapacity for mental or intellectual labour seemed to preclude all idea of his ever being heard in the pulpit. By a miracle he had been able to

hear confessions, and not long after, in an equally inexpressible manner, the gift of preaching the Gospel was granted to him, so that he often could give five or six sermons in one day.

Was it only the fictitious strength with which his zeal for souls inspired him? or was it from the breathless silence with which the crowd hung upon his words? Whatever may have been the reason, it is certain that in spite of his weak voice he could be heard perfectly in every corner of the largest churches in Rome.

His style was always perfectly simple. His wish being solely to instruct the poor, he never indulged in high-flown expressions, or attempted any flights of eloquence. The source from which he drew his inspiration was almost invariably the Bible. A chapter of the New Testament devoutly meditated upon beforehand was the daily bread he broke to his flock. Then the lives of God's saints were deeply engraved in his memory, especially those of St. Philip Neri, St. Francis of Sales, St. Vincent of Paul, and the like. He would illustrate his teaching by anecdotes taken from their lives and example, quote their words, and thus arrest the attention of his hearers. With these helps and his crucifix he was never at a loss for words or thoughts. Very often he would begin by reading a portion of holy writ, or the Gospel of the day, and then comment upon it. A few moments of meditation and a short prayer were often his sole preparation. His innumerable works of charity and his confessional precluded all possibility of preparing his sermons with greater care; but he used to say that he always reckoned on God's grace to touch men's hearts, and his confidence was never mis-

placed. After his death his friends thought they could not represent him better than by placing in his hands, with his crucifix, the holy Gospels. It was not enough for him to preach continually at St. Galla, and on Sundays besides at the "*Convertite*" in the Corso, and at St. James in the Lungara, but he would take advantage of every chance circumstance, such as popular festivals, retreats given to the servants of cardinals and princes, instructions to the soldiers, to the sick, to members of pious confraternities; everywhere, in fact, at all times and seasons, John Baptist was ready, provided only his auditors were poor and neglected by others.

He never preached long sermons; it was on principle. At St. Galla he never would speak more than a quarter of an hour, and he begged those with him never to exceed that time. "The poor come to church tired," he would say; "sufferings, privations, troubles of all kinds are their daily portion, and distract their thoughts. If you preach a long sermon they cannot follow you, and at the end they forget all you have said to them. Give them *one idea* which they can take home, not half a dozen, or one will drive out the other, and they will remember none. Experience proves, alas! that from the grandest and most eloquent discourses the poor draw no profit whatever."

Sometimes the members of St. Galla, carried away by an ill-advised zeal, would pour out magnificent flowery orations from the pulpit on abstruse and difficult subjects. The poor canon used to be on thorns all the time, and thought it his duty to remark to the preacher afterwards how mistaken he had been. Once a very celebrated Roman prelate committed this indiscretion, and afterwards,

when the priests were assembled in the sacristy, no one dared say a word to so great a man. But de Rossi, who was afraid that others might imitate him, spoke out boldly, and while congratulating him on his eloquent sermon, remarked that it was not suited to the congregation, who could not understand a word of it.

In speaking of shameful vices to mixed congregations de Rossi was most careful never to utter one word which could wound the most susceptible ears. He used to say that "no innocent soul should be troubled by having their thoughts drawn to subjects which they were only too happy not to know anything about."

There was another thing about which he was very careful and prudent. It was the custom every Saturday to relate some miracle due to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, so as to increase the devotion and confidence of the people in her; but often these stories were exaggerated and incorrect, and instead of doing good, either excited ridicule, or made the ignorant fancy they could sin with impunity, trusting in the intervention of the Mother of God. Others fell into discouragement and lost all hope, from always expecting a miracle which never happened. The good canon could not bear these scandals, and would seize the first opportunity to explain away what had been said, and then seriously warn the preachers to choose their subjects with greater care and more appropriately to their audience, so as to avoid the dangers arising from such misunderstandings. At St. Mary in Cosmedin he used in the same way to entreat the preachers not to weary their hearers with long panegyrics, which were useless to the poor.

One day, on the Feast of the Blessed Trinity, a sermon on that subject had been announced at St. Gallà by a famous preacher, who at the last moment failed. What was to be done? The church was crowded. Was there no one who would speak to the people? The priests flew to de Rossi, and implored him to take the preacher's place. De Rossi, without the smallest preparation, had to speak on this great and inscrutable mystery. But he did it with such clearness, and showing such extraordinary theological knowledge, that the ecclesiastics who were present were astonished and delighted, while the poor were equally pleased, for he had brought the matter down to their comprehension.

The same thing happened at Zagarolo, near Palestrina, where Cardinal Spinelli had entreated him to give a mission. One day, when he was going up the pulpit steps, the parish priest implored him in the course of the mission to say something of the reverence due to the priesthood, which with that rough audience was necessary. John Baptist assented; but to the surprise of the priest, he began immediately on that subject, and spoke with such unction that the whole congregation was moved to tears.

On another occasion, at St. Maria del *Pianto*, in Rome, a novena was being said preparatory to the Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul. The clergy were just leaving the sacristy to go into the choir when de Rossi arrived, having been giving a retreat in the neighbourhood. The preacher had again failed: the subject had been announced; it was to be *The Patience of the Apostles*. De Rossi had only the few seconds in which to prepare while the short prayers of the novena were being said. Nevertheless, his sermon



was magnificent; the congregation hung upon his words, and many eminent men present declared they had never heard anything more eloquent or more convincing. After dwelling on the sufferings of the apostles, he showed what was the source of their courage and their strength, and then applied the lesson to his hearers, pointing out the means whereby the hardest trials could be borne, so as to increase their merit and win their crown.

One thing was remarkable in his preaching, and that was the force and clearness of his reasoning. He never asserted anything which could not be clearly proved, and avoided carefully all such arguments as gave matter for discussion. "It is not the moment for disputations," he would say; "and in the chair of truth no one should treat of subjects which are open questions." He made the same recommendations to his missionaries. In their catechetical instructions he insisted on their keeping to the necessary doctrine, without making any attempts at proving their own erudition in dealing with disputed points.

He particularly objected to new doctrines or explanations, often started by restless spirits, who like to strike out new methods of dealing with holy writ or with the Fathers. He could not bear any one to depart from the usual traditions, even if they were not opposed to the usual teachings of the Church. Nothing was more important in his eyes than to keep the purity and integrity of the faith. In the same way he made open war against the superstitions which had crept into many of the Roman villages. In one of them he found a custom which was as absurd as it was dangerous, from the number of quarrels it occasioned. It was there an established usage that

when a young couple were married the husband should point out to his bride the particular spot on the pavement of the church where she was henceforth to sit or stand during the offices. Woe betide her if she stood anywhere else! Every kind of misfortune would instantly befall her, and nothing could avert it. No one, therefore, dared change their place, and this superstition brought about endless quarrels. Sometimes two people would fix on the same stone, or a neighbour would invade the reserved place. Not only were unseemly struggles in the church the result, but even homicides, which had no other earthly cause.

John Baptist endeavoured, by careful arguments and explanations, to do away with this absurd belief; but so inveterate was the habit that he failed to convince them. Then suddenly he announced to them that he was going to leave them; that owing to their absurd obstinacy he could not remain, and would close the mission. The people, who in reality were very pious, were in despair at this decision, and implored him with tears to remain. John only yielded when they had promised to give up this absurd custom. And this was only one instance out of many of the wonderful results of his missions in country places.

In all his labours our saint had but one object,—to sow the word of God, and see it bring forth fruit. To do this he urged sinners continually to make a general confession, so as to ensure a thoroughly good and fervent communion, and to those who had already made their peace with God he exhorted the practice of frequent communion. He had established a general monthly communion at St. Galla, to

which he devoted himself with extraordinary energy. For three days before, he moved, as it were, heaven and earth to make them worthy to receive their great King. When the day arrived he would go at dawn to his confessional, where an immense crowd generally awaited him. Then he went up to the altar, and offered the Holy Sacrifice with the fervour which was so remarkable in him, and before giving Holy Communion he would kneel on the altar step, and recite out-loud acts of preparation, which touched every heart. Then, after having distributed the Bread of Life to his penitents, he would again recite out-loud acts of thanksgiving, and that with such fervour and joy that very often the sobs of the whole congregation would mingle with his praises. These monthly communions were his great delight, and he never entrusted them to any one else.

For a certain number of the most fervent he instituted the same thing weekly, and then would collect them the night before in a special dormitory, where they made their preparation on Saturday night with de Rossi himself, who inflamed their hearts with the love of God.

Each one of these souls had been his special conquest, though often protracted through months and even years. To reach them he would first awaken in their hearts a horror of sin, and then an unbounded confidence in the mercy of God. Many were willing enough to open their hearts to him; but, led away by their passions, could not at first be persuaded to break through the chains that held them. But de Rossi never lost hope or patience. He would speak to them of the joys of heaven, of the transitoriness of all earthly happiness, and while employ-

ing their own vulgar language, would continually lead them upwards and onwards, till his own confidence and aspirations passed into their hearts. This earth, with all its riches and honours, which excited the longing and envy of the poor, what was it to the never-ending joys of heaven,—that heaven, the doors of which are opened to the poor as freely as to the rich, and even more widely?

Thoughts of paradise were, in fact, continually present to the mind of John Baptist, and found expression in his words. He was specially fond of the popular hymn on heaven which the Italian peasants are so fond of, and when he used to sing it with his sailor congregation at the Ripa Grande, in the chapel of the Madonna del Buon Viaggio, his eyes would often fill with tears of longing desire.

“O Paradiso amabile,  
Reggia del Sommo Re,  
Regno desiderabile  
Deh! quando verro a te?

Già, mio Signore Altissimo  
La vita di quaggiù,  
Mi annoia O! amabilissimo  
Dolcissimo Gesù!”

The effect of his hopefulness was often seen on his penitents. Dom John Combi met one day a man coming out of de Rossi's confessional so joyfully that he seemed not to know how to contain himself, and exclaimed out loud: “That holy man has saved me by telling me how completely God has forgiven me. He has added such beautiful things on the divine mercy and the hope of heaven,

that it seems to me impossible not to serve so good a God, or to go on sinning."

Canon Charles Ambrosetti relates that a famous Roman missionary one day complained to de Rossi that he had so little consolation or fruit from his missions, though he had spoken so strongly of the judgments of God, of His awful power and anger, and of the frightful punishments which He inflicted on sinners. "But do you never speak to them of the divine mercy and love?" replied de Rossi. And on receiving a negative answer, our saint added: "Take my advice, and preach on that subject instead, and you will see a far different result."

This missionary had great reverence for de Rossi, and at once made up his mind to follow his counsel, the result of which was the conversion of innumerable souls.

Each year a new work was undertaken by our indefatigable saint for the glory of God. The months of January and December always witnessed a great increase in the number of poor admitted into St. Galla. There were often more than four hundred, and those of the lowest class. De Rossi used to go into the wards every evening, and calling them out one by one, would find out the history and the religious state of each, and never rested till he had taught them what it was essential for every Christian to know. The fatigue of this mission every evening was inconceivable, but he never would give it up to any one else till compelled by increased illness. And then three or four priests were found insufficient for the work he carried on alone, and they were obliged to content themselves with giving an eight days' mission to these poor people.

But it was not only for the living that de Rossi laboured; he was as anxious for the souls of the dead. In November he always had an octave of Masses and prayers for those who had died at St. Galla during the past year. On All Souls' Day he would call all the inmates into the chapel, and there make them a touching address on those among their companions whom God had called to Himself, and who were often friendless and homeless, and had not any one left in this world to help them with their prayers, or abridge their sufferings in purgatory. He would draw a moving picture of the way those holy souls were imploring a remembrance from them, and warn his hearers of what their own fate might be if they refused to assist them by their suffrages. Should any unexpected death occur in the establishment, de Rossi eagerly took advantage of it to excite their charity and sympathy for their deceased companion. There was, in fact, no form of moral or social evil which he did not combat by his charity, his exhortations, and his prayers.

Another instance of this is recorded by Father Joseph Gorri, addressed to his superior, Father Leopold Bamfi, General of the Order of the Brothers of St. John of God.

There existed in Civita Vecchia a very deplorable but inveterate custom. The Confraternity of "La Stella" had been instituted to prepare criminals convicted of capital crimes for their last hour. But when, in the exercise of their charitable ministry, they went in a body from the church to the prison, the mob followed them, and often remained the whole night outside, interfering, by their wild cries, with their pious work. Even when the unhappy culprit was led to the scaffold the savage mob

was still there, howling and screaming, and seeming to take a positive pleasure in the fears of the condemned. Insults and menaces were not wanting, and all the efforts of the police had been ineffectual to stop this fearful abuse.

Canon de Rossi was preaching a retreat to the Brothers of St. John of God at the very moment when an execution was about to take place. Several of the inhabitants came to him, and implored him to put an end to these shameful proceedings. The confraternity was assembled in the church, and already the mob was gathering round and filling it. De Rossi went into the pulpit, and in a burst of eloquence he made the whole congregation feel how odious and disgraceful such conduct was. The people seemed to realize it for the first time, and one by one left the church quietly and returned to their own houses, so that the brothers could go quietly to the prison. To complete the work he had begun, John Baptist determined to accompany the criminal to the place of execution, and assist him in his last moments. The crowd followed in respectful silence. After the execution de Rossi himself mounted the scaffold, and there addressed the mob, who were already deeply impressed. He spoke with love and compassion of the unfortunate culprit who had just expiated his crime in this world by a terrible death. He implored their prayers for his soul, and then went on to speak of the far more terrible, because eternal, death which awaited the impenitent sinner in the next world. The mob, awed and impressed, dispersed quietly, and many were moved to a change of life.

In fact, Canon de Rossi never either preached, or gave catechism, or took the lead in any pious exercise, without

the most extraordinary results being obtained. His confessional, which was always thronged with penitents, gave another proof of this fact. Very often it was impossible for him to hear half the number who were waiting for him, and they had to go to other confessors; but they also bore witness to the success of his ministry.

One of them wrote: "The conversions brought about by the preaching of Canon de Rossi are innumerable. I have often known the most notorious sinners converted by a single sermon of his; yet he himself was quite unaware of the effect he produced. It was truly the grace of God working in him which brought about these wonderful miracles."

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## CHAPTER IV.

### De Rossi in the Hospitals.

JOHN BAPTIST'S CONSTANT VISITS TO THE SICK.—THEIR CONFIDENCE IN HIM.—THE SPECIAL WAY IN WHICH PROVIDENCE SEEMED TO LEAD HIM TO THE BEDSIDES OF THE SICK.—HIS PARTICULAR LOVE FOR THOSE AFFLICTED WITH CONSUMPTION.

WHEREVER human nature was to be found in poverty or suffering, there de Rossi was sure to hasten with encouragement and consolation. We have spoken of his visits as a boy to the hospitals when he had become a member of the "*Ristretto*," and this charitable habit was dear to him to the very end of his life. Every day he



found a few moments to visit one or other of the many hospitals in Rome. He would stop at the bedside of one sick man after the other, speaking to each as if he had been specially confided to him. The most burning sun in the very middle of the day in Rome did not deter him; for those were the moments when he was most free. He would find out the wants of each patient, render them a whole host of little services, and never, till he had attended to their corporal necessities, would he touch upon more serious matters. Then he would question them gently and delicately about their spiritual needs, and that with such sympathy and compassion that the sick would open their whole hearts to him, and often the most important conversions were the result. One day, when he was telling a story to show how Providence makes use of trifling things to touch hearts, he mentioned the following circumstance.

There was a young man dying at St. Giacomo degli Incurabili of a horrible disease contracted by a vicious life. "I was constantly by his bedside," related de Rossi, "and did all I could to reconcile him to God, but in vain. I came day after day, but he would not listen to me or to any one. One morning, I came earlier than usual; but he drove me away; all I could do was to commend him to God, and go and see the other patients. The hour arrived for those young men to come into the hospital who devoted themselves to the voluntary service of the sick, and I went and joined them. It was my business that day to do a very repulsive office, and it happened to be for the young man who was dying in that sad state of impenitence. This was the moment chosen by God to show forth His mercy and loving kindness. He saw what I was

doing for him, and it touched him to the heart. He said it proved to him that it was out of pure love and charity that I had come, as no one could undertake so loathsome a work without, and he then implored me to forgive his rudeness, and to hear his confession. His penitence and compunction were genuine, and I had the happiness of seeing him die in peace with God and man."

De Rossi's experience and extraordinary intuition as to the state of men's souls, gave him a wonderful insight into the hearts and consciences of his patients, and very often a look was enough to reveal their state to him. "Like a new Elisha," writes Toietti, "his presence, which breathed holiness, seemed to call to life again souls which had been buried in sin. After confession, if there were no hope of recovery, he would not leave them till they had expired in his arms."

His friends never could understand how one so frail and delicate could resist the enormous fatigue consequent on his attendance by these dying beds; but God seemed to give him on such occasions a special strength. Joseph Nerucci deposed as follows: "I looked upon Canon de Rossi as the St. Philip Neri of our day. I am convinced that he alone did more for the conversion of souls than all the other apostolic labourers in Rome put together. He was quite indefatigable in the care of the sick, not only at St. Gallia, but in all the hospitals of Rome, and especially at Santo Spirito. No matter what the cold or the heat might be, there he went daily. We often implored him to care a little more for his health, if only for the sake of being able to work longer. He would reply, 'My death would not be a misfortune to anybody. The sick implore

my help; how can I refuse it to them, or run the risk of their making sacrilegious confessions to others whom they do not wish for?"

Dom Antonio della Giustizia also declared: "Every day of his life he was sent for to one hospital or the other to hear the confessions of the dying. He would start instantly, often without ever thinking of taking any food, and when reproached for not having eaten his dinner, would reply, smiling, 'The shortest way to get to heaven is to work as long as one has any strength left. *Up there* God will remember it all.'"

It is not to be wondered at that he thus won the unbounded love and confidence of the sick, and that the most hardened sinners felt themselves moved to repentance by his very appearance. One day, at the hospital (called of "Consolation"), a young man was brought in from Ostia, terribly wounded in a bloody fray. He was a brigand, and his poor mother was weeping by his bedside, imploring his return to God, but not daring to pray for his life, as he felt sure that he would at once fall a victim to the vengeance of his enemies, who were determined to kill him in consequence of a murder of which they believed him guilty. John Baptist was deeply interested in this poor young fellow, and showed him such love and tenderness that his heart was melted, and he made the fullest confession of his sins, and received absolution. Contrary to all human expectation, his wounds healed, and his health seemed about to be restored, which only redoubled his mother's grief, for she foresaw that he would die a violent death. Her prayers, however, were heard. Another malady developed itself, and soon there was little or no

hope. One day, at the hour when the wards were full of strangers, a terrible cry was heard from his bed, which startled every one. They rushed to his bedside, and found him apparently dead. After a few minutes of profound silence, however, the dying man opened his eyes, and exclaimed, in a thrilling voice: "I have just appeared before the judgment-seat of Christ, and, thanks to Canon de Rossi, my sentence is favourable. Through his efforts, and the merits of our Lord, I am forgiven. Why should I tarry any longer? I wish to die, and I die with joy. Canon de Rossi has saved me." And saying these words, he expired.

Unexpected cures were also obtained by his prayers. Gaetano Fantoni, a friend of John's, had fallen dangerously ill, and the canon coming to see him, found him in his agony. His family were in the greatest despair, and sobbing round his bed. "Courage," exclaimed de Rossi; "I am just going to the feet of St. Philip Neri, and will pray for him." Hardly had he reached the altar of the saint than the dying man recovered his consciousness, and in a few days was perfectly cured.

On another occasion John Baptist was visiting a poor artizan, Gaudenzio Vannini, who had just received all the last sacraments, and was preparing for death. His poor wife and nine little children were weeping round his bed, whose very existence depended on the labour of the dying man. Tears filled the canon's eyes. "Have confidence," he exclaimed; "one hour after the Angelus kneel down with all these poor little creatures, and ask our Lord to cure your husband. I will make all the poor at the hospital join in the prayer." De Rossi flew back to St.

Galla, made all the sick pray at the appointed time, and the state of the sick man began at once to amend. The next day the doctors, who thought to find him dead, declared, to their astonishment, that he was quite out of danger.

De Rossi had always the greatest confidence in the prayers of the poor, and always sought for and obtained their intercession for his sick and dying cases. Once, at the Santo Spirito hospital, a man at the point of death obstinately refused all the consolations of religion. Canon Dominic Cuccumos, who had charge of the hospital, sent to tell Canon de Rossi of the fact. It was evening, and de Rossi was saying the Rosary with his poor at St. Galla. He rose directly, told all his sick people to say a fervent *Ave Maria* for a dying soul, and rushed off to the hospital. The sick man had refused to see a priest a few minutes before, but no sooner did de Rossi come near his bed than he began directly to make his confession with the heartiest contrition. Our saint prepared him at once for holy Viaticum, and had the consolation of leaving him in perfect dispositions. In fact, at any hour of the day or night, when he heard of a sick man wishing to see him, he would hurry to his bedside, and when entreated on several occasions to wait till morning, he would say, "The fear of not finding them alive, or without consciousness, would entirely prevent my sleeping." The servants at the Trinità, however, complained bitterly of these nightly interruptions, and at last took it upon themselves not to call or disturb him till the morning. The canon found it out, and bitterly reproached them. After showing them how frequently a delay might prove fatal, he exacted and

finally insisted on being always summoned, no matter at what hour or under what circumstances. His words were so unusually stern that the servants never again dared to fail to warn him of any sick call, and that without delay. Even towards the close of his life, when walking was very painful to him, he had been one day to the Villa Mattei with some ecclesiastics, when he was summoned by a sick man in the Via Banchi, near the bridge of St. Angelo. His companions implored him not to go, or at least to rest a little first. But John Baptist smiling, instantly turned and walked back, arriving very quickly at the house where he was expected.

There is no doubt that he was continually interiorly warned by God when any one urgently needed his assistance. One day, Dom Philip Mazzolini was walking with him near St. Alexis. All of a sudden John took his arm, turned rapidly back, and began walking as fast as he could in another direction. His companion followed him in amazement, till they came to a poor house, where John went straight in, and there they found a dying man, at whose bedside he instantly knelt, and began speaking to him of death, and reciting the prayers for those in their last agony. The poor man got weaker and weaker, and John went on suggesting ejaculatory prayers to him, and remained with him till all was over.

On another occasion Count Nicolas Monzoni heard the following story from de Rossi's own lips. It was night, and he was coming home after his usual visits to Santo Spirito, and to the little hospital of St. Hyacinth alongside, when all of a sudden he felt the greatest anxiety to retrace his steps, and had an internal conviction that some

one was in urgent need of him. He stopped and hesitated; it was very late, and he was very tired; but again the same overpowering feeling came over him that he must go back to the hospital. He yielded to the conviction, and as he arrived at the gates he found two people bearing a man in their arms who was dangerously wounded, and whom he assisted to carry into the ward assigned to him. Then, after having sympathized with his sufferings, he asked him if he had anything on his conscience. "O, my father," exclaimed the poor man, "I have never made a good confession, for from my boyhood I have concealed a mortal sin." At these words John's whole heart was filled with gratitude to God, as he directly understood the motive of the mysterious recall to the hospital which he had received. He at once spoke to the man of the wonderful goodness of God, who had borne patiently with his sacrilege until now, and decided him to make a thorough confession. His state was hopeless, and he had only a few hours to live. John remained with him to the last, and had the untold consolation of seeing him expire in perfect peace and fully reconciled to God.

Another time John Baptist started for the hospital of St. Giacomo. To his great surprise he found himself instead at the door of the hospital of Santo Spirito. He could not understand how he could have had such an extraordinary distraction. He resolved to retrace his steps, and take the path leading to St. Giacomo; but again he found himself at St. Peter's. After having prayed for a few moments over the tombs of the apostles, he endeavoured for a third time to follow his original destination, but again found himself at the gates of Santo Spirito.

He had hardly time to reflect on this most mysterious proceeding when a man was brought in on a stretcher, mortally wounded. Internally moved to follow him into the ward, John waited till the doctors had examined the wound, and then drew near to his bed. At the sight of him the man burst out into fearful cries and imprecations. John remained silent, only looking at him with the greatest tenderness and compassion. The wounded man stared at him in astonishment, and again John drew near and asked him if he could not do something to relieve him. At these loving words the man burst into tears. "For five years," he exclaimed, "I have refused to see a priest. But perhaps God has permitted this accident, and brought me here, that I might obtain forgiveness for my sins." The victory was won; gently taking his hand, John began a series of questions, which ended in a complete avowal of his faults and a generous pardon of the man who had been his murderer. His heavy burden was then lifted from him by absolution, and John hastened to bring him holy Viaticum. The poor fellow received it with the utmost faith and fervour. He would not let John's hand go afterwards, but kept on pressing it, while he whispered acts of love, resignation, and full acceptance of God's will into the ears of the dying man. Then John began the prayers for the agonizing, and at the words "*Proficiscere anima Christiana*," the purified soul of the sinner returned to God. "I feel confident of meeting him in heaven," added John, in speaking of this occurrence, "for never were there more evident proofs of the divine mercy."

As we have seen, it was not only in the hospitals, but in private houses also that the dying would send for him, or



make him feel in that superhuman manner that his presence was required. It was a terrible addition to his labours, and towards the end of his life it was sometimes impossible for him to go to all in the same day. On the 2nd July, 1760, having one of his very bad attacks, Canon de Rossi was compelled to put off one of his visits for some days. The instant he could move he insisted, in spite of the doctor's orders, on hastening to the sick man. What was his sorrow when he found him without consciousness, and ready to breathe his last sigh. There were several religious round his bed, but the dying man gave no sign of life, and took no notice of any of them. John drew near and called him by his name. At his voice, to the astonishment of every one, the patient opened his eyes, recognized the canon, expressed the greatest joy at his arrival, and begged to be left alone with him, when he made a general confession. Hardly had he received absolution than he fell back into the same state of lethargy, and died shortly after. The canon burst into tears of joy, and every one present gave thanks to God, who had not allowed an involuntary delay to cause the loss of a soul for all eternity.

One of de Rossi's favourite charities was to hunt out the sick who could not be admitted into hospitals, and to procure for them every alleviation in his power. He heard one day that an unhappy old man lay paralyzed at the very top of the Palazzo Colonna. For more than a year he toiled up those endless stairs, day after day, (although himself almost in a dying state,) and went on visiting him till the month of September, 1763, which was only a few months before his own death, when, being utterly unable to continue his charitable work, he found

out a zealous priest who consented to take his place by the side of the old paralytic.

There was one form of malady which was more dear to him than any other, and that was consumption. He used to say "that the sick poor were his 'reserved lambs,' but that consumptive cases were 'his special province.'" The poor whom this malady attacked were generally taken to St. Hyacinth's, where John Baptist went so often. As he hardly ever missed a daily visit to this hospital, and that the good he did was well known to all, the directors gave him a private key, that he might be able to go in at any hour. Canon de Rossi was very proud of this key, and used laughingly to say to his friends, "This is the key of paradise, for, according to my experience, to die of consumption is almost always to be predestined to heaven."

This malady causes dreadful ravages in Rome, and is proportionably dreaded. The unhealthiness of the air at certain seasons helps the spread of the disease, which carries off its victims with fearful rapidity. People believe it to be contagious in Italy, and John had more reason to dread it than any one else, on account of his natural delicacy. Many tried to keep him from visiting this hospital in consequence, but in vain. "Charity is not dangerous," he would reply, smiling. Hour after hour was spent by him in these fetid wards, breathing this infected air, leaning over the sick to hear their confessions, and to give them last words of encouragement and hope. One would think that he did everything he could to catch the disease. But God verified his words, and, to encourage his imitators, never allowed the realization of the fears of his friends. On the other hand, his presence in

the hospital brought endless joy and consolation to the patients. Dying in that way by inches, they seemed to have but one wish, and that was to be assisted by the holy canon in their last moments. To hear them speak about it one might fancy that the canon had the keys of heaven itself. Not content with visiting them in the hospitals, he would entreat his friends to let him know of any private case of this disease, and often was inspired himself to find them out. "Consumptive people," he would say, "must be preserved from two great dangers. The first is, their almost total abandonment when lung disease declares itself, which makes their life intolerable. The other comes from the fact of their age, being almost always young people who are so attacked they have to suffer more violent assaults from the devil." He added, "My long experience convinces me that very few young people are willing to die, and that this disease is most deceptive in its character. Nevertheless, by visiting them continually, and preparing them by degrees, they become at last so resigned that it is a real privilege to be able to assist them in their last moments."

He did not add that it was generally, thanks to his indefatigable care, that these happy dispositions were arrived at.

He had an extraordinary amount of tact in dealing with his patients. He never wearied them with long prayers, but would say to them a few words of extraordinary fervour from time to time. "The last hours," he used to say, "should be entirely devoted to the dying man, and not frittered away in condolences with the relations, or conversation near the bed which, especially if whispered,

irritates the patient. When a priest is not saying ejaculatory prayers, or suggesting holy thoughts suitable to that supreme moment, he should be fervently kneeling and imploring God's mercy for that departing soul."

We cannot better conclude this chapter than by quoting the words which de Rossi himself uttered one day when speaking of foreign missions, for it shows us, in spite of his own humility, how God blessed his charitable ministry towards the sick.

"Many religious," he said, "go to India and to heathen lands to convert the pagan nations, and it is a blessed work. But the Indies for me are the hospitals! And, thanks to God's wonderful mercy and grace, I hardly ever pay a visit there without seeing at least one soul saved from the clutches of the devil."

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## CHAPTER V.

### John Baptist's Missions in the Campagna.

HIS FIRST EXCURSIONS THERE.—THE GOOD HE DOES.—HE BEGINS HIS MISSIONS.—THE INNUMERABLE CONVERSIONS HE BRINGS ABOUT.—HIS CONDUCT TOWARDS OTHER MISSIONERS.

THE terrible malady from which our saint suffered, and which forced him to remain for weeks in an almost dying state on his bed, gave him only another opportunity of glorifying God and saving souls. For after these cruel attacks, the doctors forced him to leave the heavy air of

the town and go into the country. It was on one of these occasions, as we have already mentioned, that he went to Civita Castellana, when the Venerable Tenderini persuaded him first to hear confessions. And after that, he visited in succession Albano, Ariccio, Monte Rotondo, Rocca di Papa and Tivoli. A very few days after his arrival in any one of these places, the poor found him out. An invisible power seemed to draw them towards him, and John became as deeply interested in their needs and sorrows as in his Roman children. By degrees he began to see what an immense work might be done by zealous missionaries, amongst these good but often ignorant people, and he resolved to set about it at once.

Among other things he felt that great spiritual profit might be derived from the special religious festivals common in each locality, which were celebrated by the peasants with great devotion and in great crowds, but which often, for want of priests to lead them, degenerated towards evening into riotous and profane gatherings. He resolved to try and make it his habit to pass these days in the places of devotion near Rome, and thus to sanctify, if possible, these pilgrimages among the people. We will only give an account of one of these festivals, and the way he set about it.

Decima is a little hamlet in the Campagna, where, every year, the feast of St. Antony is celebrated with great pomp. Our saint consequently arrived on horseback there after dinner the evening before, and though very tired after his long journey, began at once to visit the little cabins and grottos where the peasants lived during the bad season. All the people were delighted to see him, and

gladly acceded to his request to come and meet him that evening in the village church. There the canon mounted the pulpit, and began a very simple and practical explanation of the saint's life which they were to celebrate on the morrow, and the best way of preparing for the feast. The result was that a mass of people came to beg him to hear their confessions, which often lasted far into the night. At dawn of day, however, he was again in the confessional, and when the hour of communion came, he would make them a moving allocution on the Holy Eucharist, so that they might worthily receive their Lord, and his words touched the peasants to the quick.

After Mass he would join in their simple feast, and though he eat scarcely anything, he was so gay and bright that he seemed not even to feel his fatigues, and made every one happy around him. In the evening they again met in the church, recited litanies, venerated the saint's relics, and again listened to some burning words which he would address to them on the love of God for us, and the love we should feel towards Him. "It was his favourite subject," wrote Toietti, "and he did it with extraordinary energy. His face would seem quite lighted up, as if with a ray of that divine fire which interiorly consumed him." In speaking of the death of St. Antony, he quoted the last words of the saint to his monks, imploring them to persevere in love towards Jesus Christ, and spoke so movingly of this love that the peasants were all in tears. They had come from great distances to this feast, from Ostia, Porcigliano, Practica, and even from Castel-Romano. There, as at Rome, noted sinners would throw themselves at his feet, and were as much touched at his loving-

kindness and charity as they had been with his words. The next morning at break of day, half dead with fatigue, he would ride back to Rome, thanking God for the good which had been, (according to his own account,) "so easily effected."

The time came, however, for these missions to be regularly established. Canon Lodi had consecrated his whole fortune to pious foundations, and when dying, left, among other sums, fifty scudi annually for a secular priest to preach in the most neglected part of the Campagna. Dom Carlo Ambrosetti was the first priest chosen for this mission. He was young, and without much experience, so that he earnestly entreated our saint to accompany him. De Rossi consented at once, provided he had no share in the money. When, however, the news was spread through Rome, the people took fright. They feared his absence might be prolonged, and that his health would break down from the fatigue. They flew, therefore, to his director, and implored him to forbid his departure. This holy priest knew well John's apostolic zeal, and the good he would do; so, knowing also his admirable obedience, he took very good care not to say a word to him against the proposal, and did not even show him the real anxiety he felt as to his health. John accordingly started with Dom Ambrosetti; but the extraordinary number of conversions which were the result of their first mission induced him afterwards to go by himself wherever he was summoned. In that way he went through the dioceses of Rieti, Aquila, Spoleto, and Atri. He generally set out after the Feast of the Nativity of our Lady, which he liked to celebrate at *St. Mary in Cosmedin*, so as to obtain special graces for

his work. He never returned to Rome till the end of October. The roads were then in a very bad state, being infested by brigands, and each traveller had to pay a kind of black mail. But never were John and his fellow-missioners molested, and every one attributed the fact to our saint's personal holiness. They had to endure very great fatigues; but who could complain when they saw John, already bowed with the weight of years and oppressed by illness, yet always gay and bright, and even rejoicing at the toil endured for the salvation of souls? "God be praised," he exclaimed one day, when the fatigues had been even greater than usual, "the greater our sufferings, the larger will be our harvest of sinners." And his words were always prophetic. They could only travel on horseback, which was very painful to him on account of his infirmities, the length of the way, and his not being used to the saddle. Very often he could scarcely sit his horse, yet no accident ever happened to him. In crossing mountains and streams, when very often their steeds became unmanageable, his companions remarked that John simply let go his bridle, and abandoned himself to the will of God. His exhaustion and the pain he suffered was seen on his countenance, and sometimes they thought he would die before he got to his destination; yet he always had a smile on his lips. One day, when they were going from Aquila to Rieti, which is a long way, the rain came down in such torrents, together with a biting cold wind, that the horses could hardly face it, and the missionaries had, of course, no way of protecting themselves from the elements. Canon Toietti, who was one of them, thought that John must die of such exposure; but he only



laughed at their misfortunes, and could not be persuaded to stop and take shelter on the road. This happened several times, and it seemed as if the devil, furious at his success, was quite determined to stop him if he could; but God visibly protected His servant.

The fatigues of the journey, however, were not all; the food was scarce and bad. In one place they had to suffer positive hunger, in another equally severe thirst. The miserable lodgings they found in most places added to their discomfort; generally it was a disused barn, without either bed or any other necessary of life. Sometimes even they had to sleep in the open air, exposed to all the vicissitudes of the weather; but that was better than the repulsive cabins filled with vermin, which were the only alternative.

Our saint, however, never uttered a word of complaint. Always calm and gentle, he thought of nothing but of the souls he was come to save; nothing else, according to him, was worthy of consideration; nay more, if there were a choice between one place and another, he always chose the worst. One day he was received by the only rich person in the place, who, proud to entertain such a guest, had done everything she could to contribute to his comfort. But the servant of God perceived that in this nice apartment the poor people could not have free access to him. He instantly left his comfortable quarters, and settled himself in a wretched hole near the church, which was more like a prison than anything else. There was no furniture of any sort: but the poor flocked round him, and he was as happy as a king. This very fact, moreover, had touched their hearts before he had said a word. They

implored him themselves to go back to the rich lady's house, but all their entreaties were in vain. "He had come there for them," he said, smiling, "and with them he would stay."

One only thing cost him a good deal in these poor missions, and that was the impossibility of finding more than one room very often for himself and his fellow-missioners. That any one should witness his nightly acts of devotion and penance was insupportable to him, so that whenever he possibly could, he would get into some cave or outside shed, where he could be alone, no matter what its discomforts might be. If this could not be found, he would act with the greatest tact and circumspection, waiting till his companions slept, and the like. But, thanks to this unavoidable necessity, many little circumstances of his holy and mortified life became known which otherwise would have been buried in complete silence.

He always looked upon himself as the last and lowest of the missionaries, but he could not help being their head and their model. Hard as he was towards himself, he was most tender towards them. In the diocese of Aquila two of them fell ill from intense fatigue and exposure. Our saint waited upon them day and night, and performed the humblest offices for them. Finding their state getting more and more dangerous, he offered his own life for their cure. Writing at this time to a friend in Rome, he says: "Why has not this sickness fallen upon me rather than on these young apostles? They have still so much power and strength to do good, whereas I am only a poor, worn-out, miserable old man." Needless to add that God heard his prayer, and restored them to health. At Rocca di Mezzo

another of his companions, who was the sole support of his family, was reduced to the last extremity. John felt it terribly, for already people complained that these new missions killed the most fervent of his young priests. He redoubled his prayers, his watchings, and his devoted care of his patient, and God again accepted his sacrifices, and restored the young priest to life after all human skill seemed in vain.

On another occasion, at Monte Falco, a fearful storm broke out during the night. The lightning and thunder were terrific; a thunderbolt fell close to them, and to add to their fears, an earthquake shook their poor cottage to its foundations. But John, with a calm and undisturbed face, called his companions, made with them a short and fervent prayer, and then returned to his bed and slept quietly, in spite of the fury of the elements. The next morning they asked him how he could possibly sleep like that, when every one was so fearfully alarmed. He answered, smiling, "Well, I had just been to confession; why should I be afraid?"

There was one post which he always reserved to himself, and that was to be the one to call the missionaries every morning. They used laughingly to declare he was the "*inexorable alarum*." He had two reasons for this. In the first place they were thus compelled to be always in time for the services in the church, a punctuality which was absolutely necessary in the country, where the peasants were all day at work in the fields, and could not attend to their duties at all except before sunrise. John was therefore, as his missionaries said, inexorable. When one or the other of them would protest that it was not yet

time, he would gaily reply, "Ah, but is this the time to rest?"

His second reason was, that unless he rose before break of day he could never find time for his own prayers and meditation, which he never neglected during the missions any more than when quietly in Rome. Dom Constantine Salvi, who often woke early, relates that an hour before he roused his companions he would see John kneeling between his bed and the wall, immoveable in prayer. His extraordinary fatigues and his delicate health were to him no excuse for omitting or shortening his hour of meditation.

One evening he was so exhausted that his alarmed companions determined to put his watch back an hour, that he might rest a little longer the next morning. Hardly had he begun his prayers, in consequence, than the bells began to ring for church. He hastened thither accordingly; but afterwards he reproached them bitterly for their *ruse*, telling them how fearful he was of going into his confessional, or saying his Mass, without a proper preparation for this sublime mystery.

Canon de Rossi had the strongest possible feeling on the subject of charity, and could not bear that the smallest want of concord should exist among his missionaries.

One evening, in a house in the diocese of Aquila, a proposition was brought forward, which Dom Liberti opposed, for the sole reason that he wanted to hear what de Rossi would say in reply. Every one entered into the joke, and to de Rossi's astonishment every one, in consequence, took part against him. As it was an important question in the spiritual life, John thought he ought not

to yield his opinion, although Dom Liberti made believe to be seriously annoyed. However, John's pretended adversaries began to repent of having pushed the matter so far, and changed the conversation. When night came, and every one had gone to bed, Dom Liberti heard some one knocking at his door. On opening it he found, to his astonishment, de Rossi, who with the greatest humility and simplicity said to him in a low voice, "You are not vexed with me? We are still friends?" His voice and manner touched Dom Liberti to the quick, and he at once confessed that he and his companions had only carried on the discussion by way of a joke. John breathed a great sigh of relief, and smiling brightly, wished him joyfully good-night, returning happily to his room now that he found that no cloud had arisen to mar their mutual good understanding.

He followed a certain rule in giving the missions, from which he rarely departed, and to which the other missionaries gladly conformed. After holy Mass and a short exhortation they took their coffee, or some slight food, and then went to their confessionals. At one o'clock they left to say Vespers; then they dined. The canon knew how to brighten the conversation, and made the meal agreeable to everybody. Then he went to his room for a few minutes' recollection, after which he started to visit the sick in the village or in the neighbouring country, whom he consoled, instructed, and confessed. Then he went back to the church, taught the catechism to the children, and then again repaired to his confessional. A fresh instruction in the evening, after the men had come back from their work, followed by Benediction and a

return to the confessional, closed the day. He never left the church till two hours after the Angelus. Then he said Matins and Lauds, and then joined his companions at supper, when, however, he rarely eat anything himself, but discussed the mission with them, spoke of its results, and of the reforms which might be inaugurated in this or that practice, and then retired for the night. His first care on arriving in a place was to see that the people were able to attend the instructions, so that they might thoroughly know and understand Catholic doctrine. For this purpose he visited all the proprietors, imploring them to spare their labourers for the required time, and promising that the hours should be so arranged as to interfere as little as possible with their work. At first the masters paid little heed to his words; but when they found that his promises and menaces were alike fulfilled, and that God blessed or cursed their farms in proportion to the opportunities they gave to their labourers to profit by the missions, they hastened to comply with his request, and came themselves as regularly as their men. His instructions were so clear and simple that the poorest could understand them. He preached on the catechism, and took incredible pains to leave a distinct idea on the minds of the peasants of their duty to God, to their neighbour, and to themselves. It was in this way that he made such innumerable conversions. It was enough for him to put before them in the plainest possible words the goodness and love of God, and the terrible state of men who were at enmity with Him Who had given the last drop of His Blood for their conversion, to touch the hardest hearts. Then he would dwell on the precepts of charity towards

our neighbour, all emanating from that same love which was, in fact, the key-note of his instructions. He never spoke without preparing himself by fervent prayer, and it is no exaggeration to say that every sermon of his was followed by miracles of divine grace. The peasants positively besieged his confessional, and it was remarked that the very same words used by any other priest were insufficient to touch them. There was a kind of virtue went out from him, a mysterious and inexplicable power of penetrating the secrets of men's hearts, and of producing an impression upon them which was never afterwards effaced.

One day, when he was about to give a mission, he preached upon the necessity of making good and thorough confessions, and what dispositions were required of those who would rightly approach the tribunal of penance. All of a sudden his face became very sad, and turning towards a particular corner of the church, he exclaimed, "In this very church I see a man whose soul is stained with sin, but who cannot be persuaded to make a general confession; and yet this confession is so vital to him that if he does not make it now it will be too late; divine vengeance will strike him, and he will die unabsolved." His words struck the congregation with awe and terror, and no one could imagine to whom he referred, as he had only just arrived, and knew no one in the place. Only one old man remained unmoved and disdainful, and after church went to pay a visit to the parish priest, saying to him, laughing: "You heard that good missionary's exordium just now? Well, the man who won't make his confession is myself."

This was true, and the priest forced him to own that no

soul needed it more. He used every argument to induce him to see the canon; he spoke to him of wasted opportunities; of this last warning which God had given him; of the extraordinary intuition and gift of prophecy which had been granted to Canon de Rossi, and which had invariably been confirmed by subsequent events. At last he implored him on his knees to save himself from the wrath to come. It was so much breath wasted. The mission began and ended, and the old man remained impenitent. John and his missionaries left the place and arrived at Goriano. The day after their arrival news was brought that the wretched old man had suddenly dropped down dead, and had thus been cut off, as John had foretold, in the midst of his sins.

On another occasion John found an unhappy deacon, who, forgetful of his vows, had given scandal to the whole country by an illicit connection. One of the missionaries, Dom Nicolas Bonucci, persuaded him to go and see Canon de Rossi. John received him with the greatest kindness and affection, and used every argument to win him, but in vain. In despair at his hardness of heart, John burst into tears, and conjured him to think of the scandal he was giving; of the Precious Blood shed for him, and which he was trampling under foot; of the remorse which even at that moment he knew filled his soul. At last he added that this was the last plank of safety which would be held out to him. But the more John insisted, the more the wretched man held out against his arguments. As he was leaving the mission the principal inhabitants came to thank the canon for his services, and to accompany him on his way. The unhappy deacon was amongst them. Our



saint called him aside, and in a voice broken by emotion implored him once more to save himself. "My brother," he exclaimed, "for God's sake break through this fatal tie. The wrath of God is about to fall upon you, and you will die in your sin." But his words were in vain, and the canon and his missionaries returned to Rome. A day or two later the unhappy deacon was stabbed by his own brother on the steps of the church, and died without a moment being given him for repentance. The criminal intercourse which John had in vain striven to induce him to give up had been the motive of this terrible outrage, and the instrument of his punishment.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### Canon de Rossi as Director of the Clergy.

HE SEEKS FOR THE SOCIETY OF ECCLESIASTICS.—HIS LOVE FOR YOUNG PRIESTS.—THE WAY IN WHICH HE DEVELOPES AND ENCOURAGES THEIR ARDOUR FOR THE SALVATION OF SOULS.—THEIR WALKS TO THE VILLA MATTEI.—HE IS CONSULTED BY POPE BENEDICT XIV. ON THE REFORM OF THE CLERGY.—HE OCCUPIES HIMSELF SPECIALLY WITH CONFESSORS.

CANON Dom Romuald Onorante, dean of the Roman clergy, deposed as follows: "I can affirm with certainty that through the influence of John Baptist de Rossi, all that was cold and tepid among the secular

clergy disappeared. He was so fervent that he inspired them with a like zeal, and, thanks to him, perfect prodigies were wrought on men's souls."

We have before said that John was not at his ease in general society, and it cost him a good deal to enter into general conversation on indifferent subjects. But with priests it was quite different: he felt himself in a congenial atmosphere, and never left them but when charity called him to the bedside of the sick and suffering. His apostolate amongst young priests was as fruitful as all his other works. He won the confidence and love of all the ecclesiastics in Rome, and was listened to by them with sovereign respect. Father Tavani, when speaking of this, remarked, "That a priest in a high position, invested with great authority, should influence the clergy under him is not surprising; examples, orders, promotions, threats,—all are in his hands. But that a poor and humble ecclesiastic, without any authority in the hierarchy, suffering and unknown, hidden in a little room of a hospital, should become all-powerful with his brethren, this, one must allow, was something extraordinary."

This extraordinary fact could only be attributed to the rare sanctity of John Baptist, a sanctity which he did his best to conceal, but which nevertheless unconsciously influenced and charmed all who came near him. Never was he seen alone in the streets; as soon as he appeared the priests would gather round him and accompany him like disciples to the house or the hospital he was going to visit.

The supernatural graces he received were never more evident than in discerning vocations. One day a young

priest was anxious to go to India, and consulted him. "Console yourself instead at the feet of St. Philip Neri," John replied; "stay here and follow his example." In spite of this advice the young man started. Very soon after he was compelled to return to Rome, and showed himself a truly zealous priest, doing immense good to souls. Two other priests were going to become religious. John stopped them, and these very men played an active and important part later on among the secular clergy. He prevented several other young men from doing the same thing, seeing that they were carried away only by a momentary enthusiasm. The event justified his advice, for a few years after these same men had entirely forgotten that they had seriously entertained the idea of the religious life.

Our saint had a particular esteem for the Brothers of St. John of God, called commonly "*Fate bene fratelli.*" Father Leopold Bamfi, General of the Order, and Father John Maria Ambrosi, Master of Novices at Tivoli, were his intimate friends. The latter deposed as follows: "I think that Canon de Rossi had an extraordinary and supernatural intuition as to future events, for he often prophesied things which were afterwards verified. As regards my novices also, he would at first sight point out to me which would persevere and which not, and the latter, to my great regret, all left us."

But it was not enough to lead worthy subjects to the sanctuary. John was equally anxious to sanctify those who had already entered, or who were beginning their ministry.

The first method he employed was prayer. Every time

that an ordination was announced at St. John Lateran John would persuade his most intimate friends to go with him to St. Peter's, and there implore the prince of apostles to obtain for the young priests who were to be ordained the next day the true ecclesiastical spirit and the necessary graces for their sublime mission. It is the custom in Rome that after their ordination the new ecclesiastics should repair to the Basilica of St. Peter's in the evening, to offer themselves to that great apostle and implore his assistance, and it may well be believed that this pious habit also originated with de Rossi. During the retreats preparatory to ordination he would go to the house of the mission where these exercises were held, entering into conversation with the retreatants, entreating them to make an entire sacrifice of themselves, and, after the example of the saints, to devote themselves without reserve to the glory of God. The religious of the mission did all they could to encourage his visits, knowing full well his holiness and the effect of his words, and often asked him to hear confessions, which produced wonderful fruit.

Once, when he was away from Rome, one of the members of St. Galla was ordained subdeacon. As he could not be present, our saint wrote him so beautiful a letter, and so full of useful recommendations, that John Capretti, a venerable religious, who prepared young men for ordination, begged to have a copy of it. Afterwards he never failed to read this letter to all those who were preparing to receive holy orders.

John knew the whole of the Roman clergy. He had passed several years at the Gregorian University, and for twenty years had been faithful to the "*Ristretto*," where he

met all the best students of the Roman College, in addition to which it was his business to receive and guide them at St. Galla, when sent by their director to serve and help the sick. He was the friend of each one of these young men, and treated them with as much respect as if they had been his equals or superiors. In speaking to them he would always use the third person, and not the second, (a common mark of respect in Italy,) and this very fact strengthened their affection for him, and gave weight to his words. If he met them in the street he would invite them to walk with him, and his conversation sank deeply into their hearts. If he spoke of meditation, he would point out its fruits; if of mortifications, he would prove their inestimable price. Especially would he exhort them to the frequent reception of the sacraments, and especially of the Holy Eucharist. For daily reading he would recommend, after the holy Gospels, the lives of the saints, from which, he would say, he had derived such advantage. "These lives are as a supplement to the Gospels," he would say, "as we there find the maxims and examples of Jesus Christ put into practice." But his favourite subject was divine love. "If," he exclaimed, "the love of God exacts a return from all men, how much more should be expected from priests who have received such celestial favours. And this love should not be a cold affection, but an active, moving principle, encouraging all that is good, arresting all that is evil, relieving the poor, consoling the sick, bringing the whole world to love our good God, in a word, to consume itself in the flames of charity."

Although he showed such a marked respect to the young clerics who were members of St. Galla, he did not thereby

neglect their training, or let them follow their own will. Sometimes he sent them to the Piazza Colonna, or to the Ponte Sisto, to collect the poor and bring them to St. Galla; at other times to St. Maria del Viaggio, to instruct the sailors. Their work was chosen for them, and they had simply to obey. Those who remained behind rang the bells, prepared the altars, served the Masses, and the like. The canon exacted that all should be done with gravity, modesty, and devotion, so that their very appearance should edify the spectators.

Sometimes example superseded counsel. One day a young priest of noble family objected to acting as acolyte at a High Mass, wishing for a higher place. Without answering, John quickly put on a "cotta," and before the young man could stop him John was at the altar himself, performing this humble office, in spite of his age and canonical dignity, and with the same reverence as if he had been celebrating the divine mysteries. After the ceremony he said not one word, but the lesson was enough. Ever after the young priest, to subdue his pride, chose the lowest and humblest offices.

Our saint acted with equal tact when other circumstances arose, especially when modesty was in question. He had been asked to hear the confession of a young Roman prince who had lately entered into the clerical ranks. He found him in a very unsuitable though perhaps comfortable dress. John hesitated for a moment, and then said, gently, "I will wait while your highness changes his costume, and then we can speak of the grave matter which has brought me here." The young prince retired directly, and reappeared in an attire more suited to his new state.

Nothing, however, was exaggerated in de Rossi's life or character, and he knew how to make allowances for youth, and to take into account human weaknesses and human nature. His great anxiety, therefore, was to procure innocent recreation for his young companions, and let both body and soul rest completely after their arduous works of charity. If he were their guide at St. Galla and in the other hospitals, he would also be at their head when they made expeditions into the country. It is the custom at Rome to take walks in the neighbouring Campagna, and especially in the spring and autumn, amidst the vineyards planted on all sides; hence the name of "vignate" given to these excursions.

Prince Mattei had placed his charming villa of Monte Cœlio at John's disposal when they could not make a long expedition. This villa was a favourite resort of John Baptist's. Nothing, in fact, can be more lovely than the views on all sides. At one end of an avenue of laurels the eye rests on the magnificent ruins of the Baths of Caracalla and the old walls of the city, while further on stretches the beautiful Campagna, with its aqueducts, its tombs, its ancient monuments, its lovely vegetation, and beyond are the blue Albanian hills, with Monte Cava, Frascati, and a multitude of other villages, while palaces and villas peep out of the thick green woods of Tusculum.

Towards evening John would organize a kind of picnic, which every one enjoyed, and conversation flowed freely, only checked by the canon when any word was likely to wound the feelings of another. On this head Constantine Salvi wrote: "He was very reserved in speech, and never did I hear him say a syllable which would sin

against prudence or charity. No one dared in his presence to say anything against the absent. He was always bright and gay, and full of harmless pleasantry and fun, which he encouraged in his companions; but he would never suffer an equivocal word, and any conversation which had the ghost of impropriety in it; on the contrary, he showed for such amusements the profoundest disgust, and abhorred them as much as he did lying."

His young men completely entered into his spirit. One day, after one of these picnics at the Villa Mattei, a young student got up, and with that wonderful power of improvisation which the Italians seem to have by nature, composed a graceful sonnet, comparing the beauty and peace of the scene around them to the eternal happiness of heaven, and ending by the hope that all present would assist one day at the banquet of the Lamb, "*ad cœnam Agni.*"

Every one applauded the young orator; only John appeared deeply moved, and tears flowed down his cheeks. To the interrogatories which the party eagerly put to him he could only answer, "*Ad cœnam Agni, ad cœnam Agni.*" The way in which he pronounced those words made a profound impression on all present. Every one became thoughtful, and surrounding the holy man on his return to Rome, listened eagerly to his burning words, which inflamed their own hearts, and filled them with fresh courage to labour for Him who had prepared for them so glorious a recompense.

But it was not only among students or young priests that John had such success; the reputation he enjoyed among all the ecclesiastics of Rome was astonishing.



Pope Benedict XIV. sent him one day in his name to study and report on the actual state of the clergy, and when this report appeared there were several abuses to correct which demanded careful remedies. John thought himself unworthy of this mission, but was compelled to obey, and the Pope, who only knew him by reputation, was enchanted with the able paper which John had drawn up with his own hand. The methods he suggested were easy to put into practice, and involved no undue severity. Benedict XIV. at once adopted his proposed reforms, and resolved to carry them out. Unfortunately other urgent matters prevented the carrying out of this scheme in its entirety, but John did not labour with the less assiduity to create in the minds of the clergy a truly evangelical spirit. Dom Constantine Salvi, when referring to this, affirmed that he never missed an opportunity of speaking of the love with which their hearts should be filled if they would win souls. "He always had this end in view in his conversations," continued Dom Constantine, "and after having spoken to him, one special thought always remained in one's mind, which one could not help remembering. I have often experienced it myself, and others have told me they had a similar impression. I think I am not wrong in asserting that we owe all the best priests in Rome to Canon de Rossi. I could quote a large number of ecclesiastics who, thanks to him, gave up all worldly and ambitious thoughts, and laboured solely and earnestly ever after for the salvation of souls. I have often heard him preach pastoral retreats, and can bear witness to his intense zeal for the reform of the clergy, having the strongest conviction that

the salvation of the people depended on the holiness of the priests. He would, therefore, never pass over the smallest fault, saying that the imperfections of ecclesiastics often produced the most serious consequences."

At that time priests were very numerous in Rome. The noblest houses considered it an honour to have one of their members in holy orders, and these ecclesiastics, by their wise counsels and holy lives, were often the arbiters and guides of their families. Beloved and honoured in the household, they kept alive the spirit of union and charity among its members, and set the example of every virtue. But their action was limited to their own homes. The celebration of the divine mysteries in the morning, and the recitation of their office, seemed to them the only duties of their state, and was enough to fill up their time. They never dreamt of devoting themselves to the salvation of souls by preaching or other apostolical labours among the poor. It was against this universal tendency that John wished to make a pious crusade. "To deserve paradise," he would say, "we must work without intermission. He who waits for the moment of death to deserve it reckons without his host."

To encourage them, therefore, our saint judged that retreats were necessary. In those solemn moments when man, isolated from his fellows, thinks only of God and his own soul, God gives special graces. It is the hour for examining, by the light of the Gospel, and far from the world's turmoil, if the path already chosen be the right one. It is the moment to find out in what we have been wanting, and to determine to make amends for past negligences. Above all, it is there that a new vigour is infused

into our souls to go on with our daily work in the path which God has marked out for each one of us. The canon considered that once in two years, at the very least, every fervent priest should make a retreat. Many, by his advice, followed the retreats of the Lazarist Fathers. Others he would take in hand himself, and to excite their ardour he would relate various extraordinary conversions which had taken place under his own eyes in the confessional or in the hospitals. Nicolas Monzoni states: "That this great servant of God told us these things for our own instruction, and not only was it impossible to find a shadow of self-love in his recitals, but his humility shone forth all the more from the way he contrived to leave himself out altogether."

He spoke often with enthusiasm of the wonderful holiness which would exist in the world if all priests really followed their vocation, and gave themselves up without reserve to the good of souls. When he had to preach the clergy retreats his words made an indelible impression on the hearts of those who heard him, and the very doors of the chapel were crammed with eager listeners. Once, at Spello, he was asked to give conferences to the clergy of the town and neighbourhood. His success was such that no one would miss a single one of his instructions, and the convents were closed so that all the religious, without exception, might be able to attend them. He took special pains with those who had the power of hearing confessions, for they were the most actively employed in saving souls. Such was the work done by our saint among the Roman clergy. One understands, therefore,

the following words, which the priests inscribed on his tomb:

“Vocatis in sortem Domini ad sancte vitam instituentem, et ad Christi fidelium salutem, procurandam, doctrina, hortatione et exemplo, magistro et duci, omnibus ordinibus in urbe, probato, accepto, sodali optimo, patri benemerenti, ecclesiastici urbis ad sacra ministeria ab eo instituti . . . posuerunt.”

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## CHAPTER VII.

### His Preaching to Priests.

JOHN BAPTIST'S EXHORTATIONS TO THE MEMBERS OF ST. GALLA.

—WHAT OUGHT TO BE THE FIRST CARE OF A GOOD PRIEST.—  
 THE ZEAL WHICH SHOULD BE SHOWN TOWARDS THE POOR.—  
 THAT IN ORDER TO DO GOOD ONE MUST, BY ONE'S VIRTUE,  
 FIRST GAIN THE ESTEEM OF MEN.—OF HUMILITY.

WE have before mentioned that John Baptist had been sent to St. Galla during the first years of his sojourn at the Roman College. This hospital became, therefore, the centre of his labours and his principal occupation. From 1715 to 1764 his name appears regularly in the reports of the meetings. Though wishing to remain the last of the members, our saint had speedily acquired, without his knowledge, the first place in that assembly. The associates had, in fact, constantly before their eyes three chosen souls, de Rossi, Vaselli, and Parisi. Each

had the same simplicity, the same virtues, the same zeal. God called the two last to Himself, but de Rossi remained, the inheritor of all their noble qualities.

Not content with evangelizing the poor, John thought also of the sanctification of his fellow-labourers. He began a series of little conferences for the priests of St. Galla, and preached to them every month in the church of St. Thomas dei *Censi*. Among the hearers was a certain Dom S. Cameli, who became the first postulator in the cause of John Baptist. He used to make copious notes of de Rossi's instructions, which manuscript was happily preserved, and the priests of St. Galla keep it as one of their most precious archives. There is a close resemblance between our saint's practice and his counsels; as he taught, so he acted. His short sermons were eminently practical, and with wonderful simplicity and point he traced out the path which every good priest should follow.

These conferences were held for about five years, from the month of August, 1758, to the month of June, 1763. De Rossi took generally as his theme the Gospel of the Sunday, and we will give a few extracts from Dom Cameli's notes, which will show us his method, and the way in which he carried it out. The first thing he strove to impress on his hearers was, that the main business of a priest was to save souls. Out of twenty-five of these little addresses nine treat of this subject, and all with fresh arguments.

"The Gospel of last Sunday," he began,\* which was the fourteenth after Pentecost, "tells us that we cannot serve

\* Sermon IX., 24 September, 1759.

two masters. If we love one we shall hate the other, if we cling to the one we shall despise the other. Thus we ourselves have only one Master to serve, and that is God, whose ministers we are. Him only must we obey. We have not chosen Him, but He has chosen us. *Non vos me eligistis, sed ego eligi vos.* How great is this favour, how singular this preference, when so many others deserved it so much more than ourselves! But if He has deigned to choose us as His labourers, it is that we might really *work*, and that our work should bear fruit, and lasting fruit. *Ut eatis, et fructum afferatis et fructus vester maneat.*"

Again, on the 14th December, 1759, he develops the same idea in a different way:

"In the Gospel of this Sunday," (second of Advent,) "we read that John the Baptist, being in prison, sent two of his disciples to the Saviour, asking if it were indeed He who was to come, or if they were to look for another? *Tu es qui venturus est, an alium expectamus?* Remark this, that our Lord did not reply, 'I am the Messiah:' He only told them to find out by the fruits He brought forth. 'Go and relate to John what you have heard and seen; the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, the poor have the Gospel preached to them.' '*Cæci vident, claudi ambulant, pauperes evangelizantur.*' (Matt. xi. 5.) What a lesson this is for us, my brethren! We are ecclesiastics, we are priests; but can we answer, as our Redeemer did, by pointing to our works? We say holy Mass daily, but do we celebrate these tremendous mysteries with all the devotion they demand? We say our office, but how? as a wearisome task which must be got over, or with earnest atten-

tion and love? God does not will that these great actions should be done lightly or negligently: yet even good and spiritual persons are often sadly wanting in these respects. Let us watch, then, over our daily actions. Remember that our lives, our work, should be filled with supernatural fervour, that nothing human should hinder us from doing everything we possibly can to save souls. If we be idle or indifferent in the things pertaining to God's service we shall fall into a thousand imperfections. Thank God! we are free from mortal sins, but what about venial ones? If we do not labour, by the mortification of our appetites and our evil tendencies, to destroy the smallest faults, beware lest we fall into more serious ones. In good, as in evil, *nemo fit repente summus*.

"We are called by God Himself for the sanctification of souls. How many amongst the common people are lost for want of instruction! If *we* do not do this, laymen certainly will not; and yet, if many of these laymen were in our place, what would they not do? Even as it is, do not they often shame us by their activity and their zeal? Is it not disgraceful to think that very often they labour harder than ourselves, and contribute more to the sanctification of souls? The Gospel adds that after the departure of St. John the Baptist's messengers our Lord said to His disciples, '*Quid existis in desertem videre, arundinem vento agitatum?*' (Matt. xi. 8.) No, the precursor was not a feeble reed driven by the wind; his strength and courage were great, and equally remarkable was his constancy. Although in prison, he did not fear to tell Herod, *Non licet tibi habere eam*. He neither dreaded the anger of the tyrant, nor the prison, nor the death which

were in store for him ; and so our Saviour adds : ‘ *Non surrexit inter natos mulierum major Joanne Baptista.*’

“ A generous constancy, therefore, is as necessary to us as to St. John. But how often does a slight obstacle suffice to make us give up a work we have begun, or stop us as we are beginning to undertake some useful scheme to help others ?

“ Our predecessors were far more zealous. Persecution, ridicule, cold, heat, rain, rebuffs, nothing discouraged them, however much they might have to suffer. And so their works were accomplished, and God blessed and rewarded their constancy. Remember that we are the inheritors, not only of their position, but of their labours. We are priests, chosen by God for the salvation of His people ; not to seek our own ease and comfort. Let us, then, be known by our works, and may men say of us, as our Lord did of St. John, ‘ *Pauperes evangelizantur.*’ ”

Again, on the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, he speaks as follows :

“ In the Gospel of to-day we read that our Lord met ten lepers at the door of a little village, who cried to Him, ‘ Lord Jesus, have mercy upon us.’ Our Lord told them to go and show themselves to the priests, and while they obeyed they were cured. . . .

“ Ignorance is the leprosy of the soul. How many such lepers exist in the Catholic Church, even in Rome, where many men do not even know what is necessary for their salvation. It must be our business to try and cure this disease. In old times conversions of whole cities and countries were not unusual, for the zeal and faith of our predecessors in the ministry worked miracles ; they were



filled with the Spirit of God. Are we less strong than they were, that we are so easily tired, and so slack in our labours among the poor? *Spiritum nolite extinguere.* Have we, then, hopelessly degenerated? But we need not go back to past centuries for examples. Vaselli and his fellow-missionaries did wonders in the Campagna. Let us try and deserve the like graces. Besides, if we neglect to labour for the salvation of our neighbours, let us tremble for our own. The conversion of our brethren is the object of our mission, the only real reason of our existence. It is enough for a layman to keep the commandments of God, Who will not require more at his hands. But for us it is different; as faithful imitators of our Lord, we must give our lives for the brethren. Let no fatigue, then, discourage or slacken our zeal; never let us mind the hardness, or the indifference, or the rudeness of the poor. Only let us persevere, and if we have the right spirit we shall triumph over all obstacles with the grace of God, and obtain our own salvation as well as theirs."

Again, speaking on the 14th January, 1763, he says: "We read in last Sunday's Gospel, (the Octave of the Epiphany,) that at the age of twelve our Lord remained in the temple disputing with the doctors, and when found by Mary and Joseph, who had been sorrowfully seeking Him, He replied, '*Nesciebatis quia in his quæ Patris mei sunt, oportet me esse.*' (St. Luke ii. 49.)

"Well, we also are, or ought to be, about our Father's business, the saving of the souls of our brethren. This alone is our mission. For ourselves especially, we must strive to convert the poor of St. Gall and in the country districts. This is what God asks of each one of us.

How have we responded to the call? To take one thing only,—how have we taught the catechism? *Parvuli petierunt panem et non erat qui frangeret eis.* We go and preach in public places, but with what ardour? Are we not glad of the smallest excuse to escape it? The souls of our neighbours are in our hands, and yet how many are lost through our fault? The sick die without being properly prepared, for we have not given time or care enough to each particular case. We are easily rebuffed, and ready enough to leave them, and say to ourselves: ‘Well, after all, it’s their own fault if they won’t listen to us.’ Yet, with a little more patience, a little more perseverance, a little more love, in fact, we could have led those poor souls to heaven. Many among us shrink from going to the hospitals, either on account of fear of infection, or from the sights and smells that await us there. Courage! We are not come into the world to follow our own will and pleasure, but to imitate our Lord. ‘*Non quero voluntatem meam, sed voluntatem ejus qui misit me.*’ (St. John v. 36.) If we experience some repugnance in our work, either from its nature, or from the unwillingness of the poor to listen to us, let us think of the example of St. Francis of Sales, who shrunk from no labour, no fatigue, and was rewarded by the conversion of seventy thousand heretics, and when reproached for having shortened his life by these means, replied, ‘It is not necessary that I should live, but it is necessary that souls should be saved.’ This should be our motto. Let us, then, learn greater perseverance in good works; do not let us get tepid and hopeless when unexpected difficulties arise, but let us strive courageously to surmount them,

being thoroughly persuaded that such is the will of God. . . . Again, let us ask ourselves, 'How did the saints act in similar circumstances?' Look at St. Philip Neri and St. Ignatius. The first was sent for to assist a lady on her deathbed. Her husband imagined, in his blind fury, that she would be persuaded to make a will in the saint's favour, and maddened by cupidity, declared that if the holy man came near the house he would kill him. St. Philip, nothing daunted, went to the lady, and administered to her all the last sacraments, and by thereby fulfilling simply what he felt was the will of God escaped all injury.

"In the time of St. Ignatius, a certain convent had become a subject of public scandal, from the freedom given in the parlour, where all the smartest young men of the city went to see the nuns. St. Ignatius, with enormous difficulty, induced these faithless religious to return to their duties and banish their visitors, in spite of the manaces of the young men, who, finding that St. Ignatius was determined to carry out his purpose, waylaid him one night and beat him till he was nearly dead. Nevertheless, the Saint persevered because he felt he was thereby doing the will of God.

"Such examples should stimulate our zeal and our constancy. But we need only imitate certain pious laics of our acquaintance, both men and women, who show themselves real apostles of charity, nursing the sick, assisting them in their last hours, hastening to procure good confessors for them, and the like. Shall we be outdone by these voluntary labourers? I do not say that there must not be prudence in our actions; and that un-

wise zeal sometimes does much harm ; but who does not feel his heart burn with the fire of charity for the many suffering, abandoned souls in this sad world ? We fancy that we have this love—but how do we prove it ? To believe is not enough ; we must test it by our actions, prove it by our deeds, toil for them in the sweat of our brow. Without this, how can we declare we have real charity ? ‘ *Qui viderit fratrem suum necesse habere, et clausurit viscera sua ab eo, quomodo charitas Dei manet in eo ?*’ (John iii. 17.) Rome is full of ignorance and blindness of heart. Grievous sins are committed constantly in this city ; its inhabitants will not listen to those who strive to put Christian thoughts into their minds. They only hearken to worldly advice, and turn a deaf ear to all that comes from God. In so great a peril, who is to be found who will really devote himself to find a remedy ? Alas ! Charity in our day has waxed cold. ‘ *Filioli mei, non diligamus verbo neque lingua, sed opere et veritate.*’ And can we doubt how pleasing in the sight of God are all works done for His poor ? Has not our Saviour Himself said : ‘ *Spiritus Domini super me, propter quod unxit me, evangelizare pauperibus misit me ?*’ Have we not been specially set apart for this apostolate ? But to follow Him we must have His spirit, that is, labour with a never halting fervour, and with a purity of intention which seeks for no human motive, no human reward.

“ Another reason for co-operating with all our might in the salvation of the poor, is their immense need. In the days of St. Vincent of Paul, a heretic was once heard to say, “That he could not believe the Church was led by the Spirit of God, otherwise the poor would receive the same

knowledge of His word as the rich.' Soon after, this very man happened to be in a town where St. Vincent was giving a mission, and when he saw the earnestness with which he explained the Gospel to his hearers, who were all poor, and the way he was surrounded by the most miserable and abandoned of the lower class, to whom he was teaching the first truths of our holy Faith, he was convinced of his error and openly made his abjuration.

"We also, if we devote ourselves entirely to the peasants and the poor, shall not fail to give edification to those outside the Church, and when we see the multitudes of every age who are being positively lost for want of teachers, how can we be so indifferent to their eternal welfare and to the glory of God? It was to the publicans and sinners that Jesus preached. '*Erant autem appropinquantes ei publicani et peccatores ut audirent illum.*' (St. Luke xv. 6.) How do we perform this duty? Do we go after those poor abandoned souls of whom no one thinks? We fancy we do a great deal in coming to St. Galla, or in going into the public squares to try and get hold of the peasants congregated there. If we spoke to them from our hearts should we not win them? And how many conversions have we made? It would be easy to reckon on our fingers the numbers who have made good confessions and been induced to change their lives, but yet it is only thus that we can ascertain if our works are really done with true charity. St. Philip Neri consecrated his nights, as well as his days, to the conversion of sinners; no fatigue, no danger stopped him: like our Lord, he taught sinners, and with what fruit! By one sermon alone he converted thirty young men who were leading

bad and immoral lives. The poor, the little poor of Jesus Christ, are in truth terribly abandoned; few care to devote their lives to them, and yet their needs are greater than those of any other class; if they were only properly taught, many would live the lives of saints.

“I remember at St. Galla finding a sick man whom I recommended to Parisi, and who had the greatest repugnance to going to confession, because the priest to whom he had been before had treated him with impatience and disdain, and as being one whose confession was not worth hearing. It required all Parisi’s tenderness, and charity, and devotion to make him make a general confession, after which he was very happy, recovered his health, and returned later to St. Galla, where he edified every one by his virtues. Yet that man might have been lost from the want of charity of that other priest.”

Speaking on another occasion of the way the poor should be spoken to, he said: “People should say of us what they did of our Lord, ‘*Viam Dei in veritate doces.*’ (Matt. xxii. 16.) Our language should be *truth*, that is to say, simple, without equivocation, spoken from the heart. To preach or to catechize with fine words and rounded periods is not to teach the truth, because in such a case the peasants often misunderstand our words, and derive no fruit from our instructions. *Non respicis personam hominis* was also said by the Pharisees to our Lord. We, in consequence, should beware above everything of that fatal respect of persons, that preference for the rich to the poor, which we unhappily see in some priests. We must love our neighbour as ourselves, and if in certain cases we have to show a preference, let it be in favour of the poor.

The rich and noble always find some one to come to their assistance, while the poor are abandoned and neglected. Remember that all are equal in the sight of God, who weighs men by their merits, and not by their rank or wealth. Did not our Lord shed the last drop of His Blood for the poor as well as the rich? In this, as in all else, we have only to imitate our Blessed Saviour, and bear gladly our cross for the salvation of His poor."

Our saint dwelt frequently also on the preaching of example as being even more fruitful than words. "In the Gospel of last Sunday we read, '*Vado ad eum qui misit me . . . Si enim non abiero, Paracletus non veniet ad vos.*' (John xvi. 5.) 'The apostles still clung to the human body of the Lord,' St. Thomas says, 'and that hindered the coming of the Holy Spirit.' So it is with ourselves: our affections, our attachments, are obstacles to the divine habitation in us, and by their means we often lose our fervour in the service of God. St. Philip used to say, 'That the more we are united to the world the further we are from God.' The Holy Spirit seeks for pure hearts in whom He may dwell. Let us strive, then, to detach ourselves from creatures, and then our actions will be more in conformity with our sermons. Words without works are vain. If a priest does not prove that he is disinterested and full of zeal for souls, if people do not remark in him that modesty, abnegation of self, and devotion which should belong to his priestly character, they will not esteem him, and his words will have no weight. Again, if a bishop be pompous and ignorant, how will he inspire respect and veneration? If the people see in

us the faults we reprove in them, how can we pretend to correct them? . .

“In 1736 there was a rising among the people in the Campagna, in consequence of a rumour that the conscription was going to be enforced, and when we went there for a mission they fancied that, under pretence of catechising, we were going to enrol them. I know it, because we were publicly reproached with this design. Well, for a long time we could do nothing with the people. ‘*Diffamatus est apud illam.*’ (St. Luke xvi. 1.) I only allude to this to show the misfortune of having a bad reputation if you seek to evangelize. To have a ‘good report among men’ must be the fruit of solid virtue. This alone will give weight to our words, for people are more moved by a great reputation than by anything else. When St. Francis Borgia went to Spain as papal legate, his great reputation had preceded him. The king asked him to say a few words to the people, and the saint tried to excuse himself by pleading the weakness of his voice. But being compelled to obey, he went into the pulpit. Before he had said half-a-dozen words the congregation melted into tears. Thus he preached by his reputation more than by his words.

“But this esteem must have no human object, save to lead men up to God. If we grow in human esteem, of what avail would it be, unless men thereby magnified God? ‘*Non nobis, Domine, non nobis, sed nomini tuo da gloriam.*’” (Psalm cxiii. 9.)

Humility was indeed de Rossi’s special virtue. Saint and apostle as he was, with such extraordinary gifts for winning souls, he never alluded to himself, even in these



private conferences. He spoke as himself needing, more than any of his hearers, the example of our Saviour and of the saints, whose lives he quoted, and often he would add: "I fear I have expressed myself very badly, but I hope some of the thoughts I have suggested may be as useful to you as I have found them to myself."

"If, in speaking to others," (he would often say,) "we seek for human praise, we shall produce no fruit. Our words will be cast to the winds, and God will say of us, '*Receperunt mercedem suam.*'" (Matt. vi. 5.) We must have but one end in view, to preach so as to convince others, and thus to labour for their good, forgetting ourselves altogether. Look at the apostles, with their tremendous works, their horrible sufferings, their millions of converts; yet what was their cry? '*Servi inutiles sumus.*' And if they felt this, what can we say? What are our labours compared to theirs? Although, like them, we have been chosen among the people to preach the Gospel, even if we were rightly to employ every talent we have received, how can we be moved to vain-glory? for these talents come to us from God, and of ourselves we have nothing but misery and sin. We pride ourselves upon this or that; but nothing is ours,—all is from God. How then dare we appropriate the honour and glory which are His alone? . . . Caiphas, who was high priest, declared the necessity that one man should die for the people. This he said in prophecy, but without understanding the sense of his words. God, then, made use of this bad man, who afterwards condemned Jesus to death, to declare His truth to the world. This thought should stifle any feeling of pride arising in our hearts should God

make use of us in the exercise of our ministry. Even if innumerable conversions were the result of our preaching, should we be their cause? Would not God simply make use of us, as He did of the wicked Caiphas? Once upon a time a famous preacher obtained wonderful results from his sermons, and he could not help glorifying himself a little over his success. But God made known to him that the whole merit rested with his companion, who, kneeling behind his pulpit, was praying with fervour the whole time. . . .

“Caiphas prophesied, but what fruit did he derive from his prophecy? None at all. God grant that those who teach eternal truths to others may not stray themselves from the right path. Let us always fear this, and say to ourselves, ‘*Ne forte eum aliis prædicaverim, ipse reprobus efficiar.*’ (Cor. ix. 27.) St. Paul himself trembled at this thought, and how much more reason have we to fear.”

We will not prolong these quotations, which are sufficient for our purpose. They show the wonderful clearness and simplicity of our saint's method of preaching. But what we cannot reproduce is the peculiar unction with which he spoke, and which penetrated the hearts of his hearers, engraving in them, as it were, the truths which God inspired him to speak.

# ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE ROSSI.

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## FOURTH PART.

### THE

## Virtues and Death of Canon de Rossi.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### The Faith, Hope, and Charity of the Saint.



N CONSIDERING the heroic virtues of Canon de Rossi, we do not mean to speak of all his merits, but simply of the three great theological virtues which distinguished him. And first, as to faith: his extraordinary recollection in church, and the emotion which he could not help showing when celebrating the divine mysteries, were sufficient indications of this virtue. But among the few papers found after his death was a little sheet on which he had inscribed, with a trembling hand, some of the aspirations of his soul. "*Credo in Te, veritas infallibilis*;" "*Credo quidquid credit Sancta Mater Ecclesia*;" "*In hac fide vivere et mori cupio*;" "*Ah! si mihi daretur pro fide mori*;" are among these written

ejaculations. He seemed, in fact, always to live in the presence of God. In the middle of the street he would recite the *Angelus*, to the edification of all who saw him. Before every action he made the sign of the cross. Count Dominic Tenderini, who was his pupil for some time, deposed, "That it was enough to see the canon say grace to perceive that he was a saint. Taking off his biretta, standing devout and recollected, he acted as a man would do who was performing a serious, and not an every-day or usual action. Every evening he said his Rosary with the greatest piety and recollection. I felt that he always lived in the thought of and the presence of God."

Another remarkable sign of his faith was his devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. When he came into a church where there was Exposition, and that his eyes rested on the Host, he fell instantly on his knees, where he remained immoveable, and as if plunged into an ecstasy. He seemed as if he could not take his eyes off the altar, and used to envy the fate of the flowers and lights which were being consumed in the presence of our Divine Lord and Master. But was he not himself a living holocaust before the majesty of God?

He loved to pray before the tabernacle, and would spend hours there when not prevented by his charitable duties. Towards the end of his life, when he could no longer go after his sick people, he used to be carried into the chapel in the interior of the hospital, and passed his time thus in profound adoration.

While he was at St. Mary in Cosmedin he was requested to bear the Blessed Sacrament in the procession on Corpus Christi. The people were chanting the *Te Deum*. When

they came to the words, "*Te ergo, quæsumus, famulis tuis subveni quos pretioso sanguine redemisti,*" he burst into tears, and was unable to join any longer in that hymn of praise.

The clearer his faith was, the more he was anxious for its integrity. The incredible pains he took at St. Galla to instruct the poor there was mainly with the object of reviving and strengthening their faith, and making them more clearly understand the leading doctrines of the Church. Many people implored him to explain his method of teaching the poor,—a method which had such wonderful results. To satisfy them, our saint wrote a little treatise on the subject, entitled, "A very simple explanation of things which every Christian ought to know." It is a sort of catechism, but unfortunately the last part is wanting. He took pains also to explain the symbols and pictures in the churches, which are to the poor and unlearned often more useful than books. For instance :

"Why is God the Father represented under the features of an old man ?

"Because He appeared thus to a prophet of the Old Testament, and also to make us poor mortals understand His eternity.

"Why is the Holy Ghost represented in the form of a dove ?

"Because He appeared thus on the head of our Lord at His baptism by St. John the Baptist in the river Jordan. He also wished thereby to manifest to the world the innocence of the Saviour, whom men at the moment of His baptism looked upon as a sinner," &c., &c.

His sorrow was very great when he heard that any

infidel or heretical book was being circulated in the town, or even any work which gave rise to doubts and objections. One of these books was doing great harm, and some one came to tell him it had been condemned and put in the Index. With great joy he asked John Combi to get him a copy of the decree, which he circulated everywhere before even the good news was publicly announced. On another occasion a friend of his met him at St. Peter's with tears in his eyes. "What is the matter?" he exclaimed. "I have just learned," replied our saint, "that a book attacking the principal articles of our faith is being published here. I came directly to throw myself at the feet of Peter, and implore him not to abandon his flock, and to arrest the evil with which we are threatened."

The zeal he showed for the preservation of the faith was not less than when it was a question of diffusing it. One day he was going through the *Ghetto* with Dom Antonio Podiani, when he turned round and asked him to say the Creed with him. And as he walked and repeated it, he went on sighing and saying, "O, poor people! poor people!" His companion asked him why he was so sad. "Do you not feel," replied John, "the awful blindness of these people who will not see the truth?" He advised him afterwards always to say the *Credo*, in the hope that this act of faith might help in their conversion.

Dom John Mosca received one day at the Trinità dei Pellegrini a man who implored him to solve his doubts. Born in Rome of Catholic parents, he had gone as a boy with a rich Englishman to London, where he had been persuaded to apostatize and become a Protestant. Then, having nothing to guide him, he had plunged into vice:

but now, full of remorse, his only anxiety was to return to the Catholic faith. Dom John Mosca, thinking himself unworthy of undertaking such a conversion, brought him to the canon. De Rossi, who was never happier than when thus employed, soon won the poor fellow's heart, and prepared him for his abjuration. Finding that his conversion would leave him without any resource whatever, he provided him each month with what was necessary for his maintenance.

Such was our saint's faith. His hope was not less fervent. One day, some one asked him to do them a service, adding, "If you will consent to this I will give you a monument in heaven." "I don't care for any monument," replied John Baptist; "I want to go there in my own person."

This hope was not a vain presumption, for he made use of every means to attain to this end; that is, he laboured without ceasing, reckoning on God's mercy to obtain his reward. "God, in fact," as exclaimed Toietti, "God was his only aim." "*In te, Domine, speravi, non confundar in æternum.*" "*Si consistant adversum me castra, non timebit cor meum.*" "*Si exurgat adversum me prælium, in hoc ego sperabo.*" These were his constant ejaculations. It was this hope which rendered him so indefatigable, and which consoled and encouraged him in the midst of the cruellest sufferings. Very often his missionary work led him into great dangers, and he frequently ran the risk of losing his life. When implored not to expose himself thus he would reply, smiling, "When one wishes to attain one's end quickly, one frequently takes short cuts." In confession he would speak so earnestly of the mercy of God that

he encouraged the most despairing souls to trust in Him. He would often quote the words of St. Francis of Sales, "That our miseries are the throne of the mercy of God." Out of this hope arose that perfect peace which he always enjoyed, and which made him bear the heaviest trials with patience. During his frequent illnesses he was always gay and bright, though his sufferings were sometimes excruciating. He laughed at them, and turned them into ridicule, to the amazement of the watchers. In truth, it seemed a perfect joy to him to suffer. When his illness increased his joy did the same, like a pilgrim who felt himself nearer every moment to his journey's end.

Death might strike him at any moment. This thought was ever present to him, but he was ready, and so not afraid. One day he was going to Decima with Dom Antonio Podiani, who was driving him in a little carriage. In the middle of the road the horse suddenly took fright, and ran away in the direction of a steep precipice. The wheels actually hung over the chasm, and their escape was nothing less than miraculous. Dom Antonio was horribly frightened at the danger they had run, and to his great surprise our saint turned to him and said, quietly, "After all, where would have been the great misfortune? We should have gone to heaven." And as his companion was still unconvinced, he began speaking to him more fully of the confidence we should have in God if we are striving to labour for His glory and the good of our neighbour. And then he went on to speak of heaven, not as a distant region known to God alone, but as a home which is waiting for each one of us, and which we ought to possess, as it is ours; being purchased for us by the



Blood of Jesus Christ. It was this longing for heaven which made him so despise the goods of this world. When his cousin, Dom Lorenzo, insisted on his accepting the canonry of St. Mary in Cosmedin, he pointed out to him that he would otherwise some day have to beg for a bed himself at St. Galla. But this prospect, so far from alarming our saint, seemed, on the contrary, to fill him with joy. "If it be difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven," he would say, "the poor are surely in the right road."

In spite of all we have said, however, the devil would not allow the canon to escape occasional feelings of fear. Mgr. Joseph Garampi, who was afterwards made a cardinal, preached one day before him on the very small number of the elect. John Baptist met him afterwards, and said to him, "Your proofs are very convincing. I feel I have reason to be very much afraid." But the preacher, alluding to this speech of his, added: "His fears were those of a just soul, who from his very nearness to God realized more than others the heinousness of sin. He had the humblest opinion of himself, but the firmest hope in God's promises, and in the merits of Jesus Christ, through which alone we obtain salvation." Very often, when the poor expressed their fears to him, he would reply, "My dear children, do not fear. If you lead Christian lives, if your daily conversation be holy, if you do your best to follow the commandments of God, wait for death without terror, and hope for an end which will fill your soul with joy, and make you inheritors of the kingdom of heaven."

If sufferings and dangers, however, did not disturb our

saint's calm, other things greatly ruffled and distressed him. If he heard of some grave sin being committed, for instance, his face would suddenly change, and his whole body tremble with emotion. The thought of offences committed against the majesty of God caused him more pain than anything else in this world, for his interests were those of his Lord's. In the same way his whole heart would overflow with joy if anything turned happily to the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

It is not necessary that we should speak again of the divine love which filled his heart, and which often found vent in tears; nor of that same love and charity which he extended to his neighbour, at whose beck and call he was always ready, whether ill or well, day or night, at all times, and in all seasons. "Remember," he would say, "the words of the Venerable Father Avila, 'We ought never to delay or to spare ourselves any fatigue when it is the question of a soul, for perhaps God intends to bring about the conversion of a sinner solely by our means.' I feel this so strongly," he added, "that as long as I have breath in my body I will go wherever and to whomsoever I am called."

His charity was also shown in the immense care he took never to hurt any one's feelings; and if obliged occasionally to find fault, he would do it with such gentleness that the reproof made all the deeper impression. At the Trinità dei Pellegrini a similar case happened to one we have already related as taking place on the missions. After supper, during recreation, the canon made use of some gentle pleasantry in speaking to one of his priests, which, however, annoyed the latter, who would not take it as

a joke. When they were going to bed John came to his door, and in the most humble way apologised for having unintentionally given him pain, asked his forgiveness, and added, "You are not angry with me now, are you?" a touching act of humility and delicacy, which showed the extreme fear he had of sinning against charity.

In spite, or rather perhaps because of his extraordinary merits, the canon had many enemies. We have already alluded to the way they made him suffer. But his only answer was patience and silence, and whenever he could, returning good for evil.

He had an extraordinary gift of reconciling adversaries, and bringing about peace in families. He was equally happy in his way of encouraging those who were suffering from misrepresentations and unjust persecution. Among the Brothers of St. John of God, whom he was very fond of, as he met them constantly by the bedsides of his poor, one of them, Father John Maria Ambrosi, Master of Novices at Tivoli, was suffering under the load of a most grave and unjust accusation. He asked John Baptist's advice in the matter, and John answered in a letter, which we will transcribe literally.

*"Sit Nomen Domini benedictum.*

"St. Francis of Sales, being then bishop, was terribly calumniated by a gentleman, who accused him of immoral conduct. For four whole years he bore this calumny without attempting to justify himself, and until God, who cares for His own, had miraculously shown his innocence. St. Vincent of Paul, being rector, (if I do not make a

mistake,) just as he was about to found his congregation, was falsely accused of a theft of four hundred dollars, and although he knew who the real thief was he would not clear himself, but left it to the providence of God. Yet St. Francis and St. Vincent continued their ministerial works, and did untold good.

*“Quia acceptus eras Deo, necesse fuit ut tentatio probaret te.*

“Do not, then, attribute what has happened to you to the devil, or to the malice of men, but look upon it as a special grace from God, who will dispose all these events for your greater good. Therefore, stay courageously where you are, fulfilling the important duties confided to you without any change, until God, through your superiors, shall see fit to dispose things otherwise. ‘God knows,’ said St. Francis of Sales, ‘what reputation is needful to us.’ Be, then, without anxiety; knowing that God will be our helper, and that everything which happens to us in this life has only one end, our everlasting good and the acquisition of true humility, which is the fruit of tribulations.

“St. Paul gloried willingly in his weaknesses, so that the grace of Jesus Christ might be magnified in him. This, too, was St. Francis of Sales’ principle. Be valiant, then, and full of conformity to the divine will. Go on working in our Lord’s vineyard as before, and bringing forth the same good fruit; above all, be silent and patient. Perhaps you may not understand this answer to your letter, but if you read it over two or three times I think you will see my meaning. Pray for me.”

John Baptist in this letter simply traced out his own line of conduct as regarded his enemies and those who had done him wrong, so that he was actually practising what he preached. To sum up what we have said in this chapter, we will only quote the words of Dom Cosmo Torretti: "I knew Canon de Rossi most intimately when he came to the Trinità dei Pellegrini, and seeing the perfection of his daily life, I always felt that he possessed the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity in an heroic degree."

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## CHAPTER II.

### His Renunciation of the World.

FROM HIS EARLIEST CHILDHOOD JOHN RENOUNCED THE WORLD.

— HE DISTRIBUTED DOM LAWRENCE'S INHERITANCE.—THE POVERTY TO WHICH HE WAS REDUCED.—HE GIVES AWAY EVEN PIOUS OBJECTS.—HIS AVERSION FOR LEGACIES OR GIFTS.—TOWARDS THE END OF HIS LIFE HE IS CONSTRAINED TO ACCEPT A SMALL LIVING.

WE have already seen that John Baptist did not wait for his ordination to renounce both money and position. His uncle, Dom Lawrence, with whom he lived, was devoted to him, and would gladly have given him anything he fancied. But during the many years they lived together, John never asked for anything for himself, and

never coveted any of the objects in which young men mostly delight. He used to plead very often for money for the poor, and obtain gifts of clothes and food for them; but for himself he would neither ask for nor accept anything. We have seen with what difficulty he was induced to accept the canonry, which required a direct order from his confessor; and how he resisted as long as he could accepting the inheritance which had devolved upon him on his uncle's death. Fortune, however, seemed to smile upon him. The property left by Dom Lawrence was considerable. There were two large houses in the town, abundantly and even richly furnished, a large store of linen of all kinds, a magnificent library, and a very considerable annual income. Besides that, he had the revenues of his canonry; in fact, on the death of Dom Lawrence, John Baptist found himself with an unusually large fortune: and many envied him his independence. But our saint, what did he do with it? Hardly had he closed the eyes of his benefactor, than he began to distribute his goods. Before the end of the first fortnight the greater portion had disappeared. The poor were relieved, the old sheltered, young girls received their dowry for which they had waited to enter into religious orders. Every description of want found an antidote. The house in the Trastevere was given to the chapter of St. Mary in Cosmedin, together with a large sum to restore the Basilica. "I don't know what to do with all this money;" he replied to certain canons who scrupled at receiving it.

At the end of a few months, when he came to live in that wretched house near the church, nothing remained

but the worst furniture and a few pious pictures. And hardly had he installed himself in his humble rooms, than he began to think he had too much furniture, and that he had better dispose of all the rest to a dealer for fifteen dollars. Happily his friends found it out in time, and persuaded him instead, to sell one of his pictures, for which Canon Chiari obtained twenty-five dollars. But the sale was only postponed; a little later, the same friends on arriving, found everything gone. On expressing their vexation, John Baptist simply said: "Such good pictures were not fit for me. I prefer engravings."

However, soon after, these poor engravings were to share the same fate. A Spaniard came to see him and admired them very much, especially a set of German etchings, representing scenes in Holy Scripture. John's hospital for poor women was in need of funds, how could he resist? He sold them all to the Spaniard on the spot, and gave the proceeds to the hospital.

Nine years later, when he went to live at the Trinità dei Pellegrini, he brought with him the whole of his possessions. They consisted of a bed, a table, a *prie Dieu*, two chairs, a little cupboard for his clothes, and thirteen common prints to stick upon the walls. Looking round after these poor bits of furniture had arrived, he thought the cupboard an unnecessary luxury, and sold it at once. "But where will you put your clothes?" objected his friends. "Bah!" exclaimed John, "with two nails and a bit of string I shall have quite room enough for my wardrobe."

Nothing remained to him then, but his canonry, of which he had to give half to his coadjutor. In 1760, he

gave it up altogether, reserving to himself only a monthly pension of eight dollars, (40s.) which was barely enough for his food. Among other things which he had inherited from Dom Lawrence was a large quantity of linen; that went with all the rest. In vain he was entreated to keep what was necessary for his personal use. "It is too fine for me," was his only answer. His own shirts disappeared in the like manner. Very often he had only the one he wore. One day Dom Niccolo Bonucci saw him returning home in haste, and with visible embarrassment. He found out that, having discovered a man quite naked in one of his rounds, John had taken off his own shirt to cover him. And this happened several times.

Those who were living with him at the Trinità, and who loved and venerated him as a saint, resorted to endless ingenious methods of supplying his needs, which made them seriously unhappy; but all in vain. If they made him some new shirts, forthwith they were given to the poor; or if he were obliged to keep some, he chose always the worst. Once, while giving a mission, he wanted a clean shirt: they hastened to give him two; the second instantly disappeared. To their reproaches he answered, laughing: "Would you have me wear two at a time? that poor man who came just now had none; how could I leave him thus, and keep two for myself?" It required the tears of his friends to make him leave off his rags, and exchange them for some shirts of their own, which he would accept simply that he might not hurt their feelings.

In 1759 he had a serious illness. His friends hastened to his bedside, and found him in want of everything. He had neither sheets, nor night-shirts, nor anything neces-



sary for a sick man. However, they were careful to give everything, not to him, but to the prior of the hospital, so that he might supply his wants, and that the things might remain in his, the prior's, care. Even then John found them out, and managed to distribute some of them "to his dear sick." We must not, however, fancy from this that John did not care for cleanliness; on the contrary, he was most particular about it. He was quite content that his cassock should be worn, that his stockings should be full of darns, that his shirts should be mended; but he insisted that they should be clean. He was poorly clad, but never unworthily of his sacred profession. He constantly quoted those words of St. Bernard: "Poverty pleases me, but dirt is my aversion."

There were one or two things, however, to which John clung as though they had been precious jewels. The first was a copy of the Madonna in St. Mary in Cosmedin, the work of Canon Chiari, which John always carried with him. He also cared very much for a little reliquary containing the relics of St. Philip Neri and St. Louis of Gonzaga. If we add to this the watch and cappa magna of Mgr. Tenderini, which the latter had left to him specially, and which he looked upon as the relics of a saint, we shall have enumerated all the objects to which our saint clung on this earth, and they were of a kind which make one realize still more his detachment from any purely worldly possession. Though these things were dear to him, however, he was ready enough to make the sacrifice when required. The portrait of our Lady went to a Spaniard, who had earnestly desired a copy of that particular Madonna. The relics of his favourite saints were given by

him to Dom Joseph Carminati, who had expressed in his hearing an ardent desire to possess a relic of St. Louis of Gonzaga. He heard later that one of the canons eagerly coveted the cappa magna of the venerable Bishop of Orti, and instantly implored him to accept it, thus parting with the only things he really cared for in this world.

The watch alone he retained, both from affection for the donor, and also for use. But that, too, he had to resign. A stranger one day asked to come into his room to make a general confession, and only after his departure did our saint discover that the man had stolen his watch. He consoled himself by thinking that only extreme distress, and the fear of falling into the hands of his creditors, would have induced him to commit the theft. But John's friends were not so easily consoled, and insisted upon endeavouring to trace the thief. John yielded, till there was some mention of putting the matter in the hands of the police; then he took fright. "Never," he exclaimed, "would I cause such a misfortune to my neighbour. I would rather lose all that I possess. Besides, he who took my watch certainly needed it more than I."

This answer may provoke a smile, but it gives us an insight into the profound love of the poor in his heart, which shrunk from no sacrifice, forgave the wrong done to himself, and tried to change it into an involuntary alms. Duchess Isabella Strozzi, who greatly venerated our saint, heard of the circumstance, and insisted on replacing the watch, which was so necessary to him for his daily engagements. Contrary to his usual practice, he accepted her gift; but then, finding it too valuable a one, he exchanged it with Dom Giacomo Maria Costa for a common

watch of his, which John declared answered his purpose much better.

The canon invariably refused all gifts offered to him, although it was the custom in Rome to receive such. When he gave his little addresses to the servants and secretaries of the cardinals or princes, they never dared offer him even a refreshing drink. Many of the nuns, when he gave retreats, implored him to accept some little proofs of their gratitude, but he resolutely rejected them. On another occasion, when they sent him some linen to use during one of his illnesses, he sent it back with the message, "that if they ever attempted it again he would not set foot in their monastery." The captain of the guard, who knew the good John had done among the soldiers, tried on one occasion to send him a small sum of money; but John indignantly returned the purse, and expressed himself very strongly on the subject. Many of those he had helped among the poor were most anxious to express their gratitude. One poor peasant sent him some little cheeses, saying they were all he had, and implored him to take them. John was very much touched, but sent them back to him, saying that he made it a rule never to accept anything in return for any little good which, by the grace of God, he had been able to effect in the confessional. Another poor woman sent him four capons at Christmas, imploring him not to consider them as a payment, but only as an expression of her gratitude. "I cannot," replied our saint; "it is no great fatigue to me to hear confessions, and I wish to keep my liberty of speaking in the administration of the sacraments without any extraneous considerations."

At Narni John had preached a retreat to the nuns of St. Bernard, which had been attended with extraordinary fruit. These religious found out the extreme poverty of the preacher, and at his departure presented him with a large roll of linen of their own manufacture. Our saint was greatly distressed, and returned it. The nuns had recourse to Cardinal Joseph Castelli, the protector of the convent, who sent him an order to accept the gift. But the canon hastened into the cardinal's presence, and set before him so strongly the motives of his refusal that his eminence, whose veneration for our saint was only increased by the interview, left him free to follow his own wishes in the matter.

During a serious illness he had in 1759 one of his oldest penitents died, Joseph di Luna, who, in token of his gratitude, left him fifty dollars. John was in bed when the executor, Dom Bonucci, brought him this little legacy. The sick saint was in despair; he would not hear of taking it, said that it would cause no end of scandal, and insisted on its being returned to di Luna's family; but Dom Bonucci positively refused, and left the money on the table. A few days later he heard that the canon was worse, and wished to see him. He hastened to his bedside, having forgotten all about the legacy; but the moment John saw him come in, he exclaimed, "I have had no sleep or rest since you left me that money; as you will not yield, you must please to distribute it for me in good works. Here is a little list; take it and the money, and never let me see it again." Dom Bonucci, touched and edified, undertook the commission, and John himself became instantly better.

For that same reason he never would help in the wills

of the dying. He was always ready to remain for hours by their bedsides to encourage and console them; but whenever there was a question of making their wills he would instantly retire, pleading that he knew nothing about business, in order to avoid all suspicion, and lest he should lower his ministerial office in the care of souls by mixing himself up with worldly affairs. This entire renunciation on his part of all worldly interests was well known in Rome. The canons of St. Mary in Cosmedin found it was useless to speak to him on any questions of temporal advantage to the chapter; but if any extraordinary outlay were proposed, either for the restoration of the basilica, or for a pious work, then he would approve warmly, and even urge them to an increased expenditure.

In spite of all the care he took to hide his extreme poverty, those who were in the house with him could not help knowing it, and the fact gave very painful anxiety to his friends. His charities also often exceeded his means, and made him contract debts which it would have taken years to pay out of his miserable income. He had on one occasion borrowed a large sum from the Duchess Sforza, which he had bound himself to repay within a certain time. All of a sudden he fell dangerously ill; not knowing how to meet his liabilities, he sent for a dealer to value the few poor articles left to him, and sent the money to the duchess, telling her how much he suffered from his inability to pay her more at that time. The duchess was inexpressibly touched. But John recovered and never rested till he had made up the debt. He never borrowed save in the most urgent cases: and his horror of wronging anyone made him all the more careful in money matters.

At last his friends determined to try and get him some extraneous assistance without his knowledge; and a year before his death, Mgr. John Lescari, afterwards archbishop of Genoa, and Dom Louis Cortini heard that a small benefice had fallen vacant in the Diocese of Albenga, near Genoa. Without saying a word to John Baptist, they applied for it for him. The holy Father and Cardinal Cavalchini, who knew well both his holiness and the poverty to which he had reduced himself, were delighted at the proposal, and immediately granted it.

The cardinal accordingly wrote a letter with his own hand to the canon announcing his appointment. John was looking up some poor people in the heart of the town, and the note was left at the Trinità dei Pellegrini. It came upon him on his return like a thunderbolt, and after a sleepless night he sent the following answer by peep of day: "The favour which his Holiness has deigned to confer upon me has deprived me of all rest, and it seems to me if I accept it I shall soon lose both health and life. It is, in fact, too heavy a burden for me, and I am the more troubled as the demand was made without my knowledge. His Holiness has too much consideration for me in thus wishing to ensure me a comfortable maintenance in my old age. But my state is not so critical. Not only have I all that is necessary, but even if I limit myself to what is indispensable, I have a surplus to give away. If I accept this benefice, I shall not know how to spend its revenues. Therefore I have had recourse to the excellent Dom Fortini, that he may intercede, in my name, with the cardinal and the holy Father, so that this living may be given to another. Very powerful motives oblige

me to refuse it; and if I were to accept it, I fear I should imperil my eternal salvation. I hope that this favour may be granted to me, and that the few days I may yet have to pass on this earth may be spent in peace."

This beautiful and characteristic letter did not produce any change in the mind of the Pope, who, through his confessor, sent him an order to accept what Divine Providence had sent him. He was therefore compelled to submit: but as everyone knew that if he had the money in his own power he would give it away the instant he received it, it was never paid to him but to the Prior of the hospital, who supplied him with all that was necessary without consulting him, or allowing him any choice in the matter. Sometimes he would plead for some of the money, which instantly went to his poor. A few months later, his last and terrible illness began; and then the great utility of this little income was apparent, as everything could be obtained for him without having recourse to public charity. Nevertheless our saint always sought for an occasion to give up the living, and this desire never left him up to the very last hour of his life.

## CHAPTER III.

## His Almsgiving.

JOHN BAPTIST GIVES ALL TO THE POOR.—THE GOOD HE EFFECTED BY HIS CHARITY.—HE BEGS OF THE RICH.—DUCHESS ISABEL STROZZI.—GOD REWARDS HIS ZEAL FOR THE RELIEF OF THE POOR.

WE have already seen the way in which John distributed all his revenues among the poor; yet, strange to say, when he had done this he still found means to give extraordinary sums in charity. The money seemed miraculously to multiply in his hands. In visiting poor families he generally left a sequin, that is, about ten shillings, with each. One of his penitents seeing this liberality, one day said, laughing, "Why, you must be a millionaire." "Not quite," replied John, smiling, "for to get to the end of the month I have only a paul left," (that is, sixpence.) The revenues of his canonry, in fact, were looked upon by him as the property of the poor. When he had to buy something personal which was absolutely necessary he would grumble and sigh, and never consent unless compelled to do so. His greatest wish was to live as a pauper, deprived of all the little comforts which money brings.

In his last illness he was ordered a certain soup made of viper's flesh, which was considered in those days a certain



remedy for wasted strength. It was useless for him to refuse, as his friends were quite determined to follow to the letter the doctor's prescriptions. The sick man called his servant, and begged him to find out secretly what this peculiar soup cost; "for," he added, "I cannot be such an expense to the hospital, so that I shall ask to be admitted to the *Fate bene fratelli*; there, at any rate, I shall be able to die like a poor man."

"His charity towards the poor was, in fact, so great," deposed Dom Philip Liberti, "that his only wish was to be as intimate with them as if they had been his own personal friends or relations. He often said to me, 'What great good one can accomplish by living with the poor!' His love was such that he declared very often that he would be laid with them after death. I attribute it entirely to his humility that he did not mention this on his deathbed; for if his body had rested at St. Galla, where he was so well known, he would at once have been, as it were, canonized by the voice of the whole people, and I think that was the motive of his silence, although the wish was very near his heart."

Among the poor, John Baptist's peculiar care were those whom the French call "*les pauvre honteux*," i.e., those who have known better days, and are too proud or sensitive to beg or make their distress known. He was always hunting them up in different quarters of the city, and provided them with what was necessary with the most extreme delicacy. "I am always so glad to help them," he used to say, "for they are more like Jesus Christ than any others,—noble, and yet so poor."

A young ecclesiastic who often came to St. Galla was

miserably dressed. John Baptist, who guessed his distress, had a new suit made for him, and begged him to put them on. On another occasion a poor priest had been received as a patient at St. Galla. John hastened to the prior with a bundle of clothes for him. The prior perceived that he had given his own cassock, and only kept a miserable old one for himself. He entreated him to take it back, saying that the priest would never be able to use it. John refused, adding, "God will provide what I want by-and-bye." In the meantime the poor priest died, and the prior brought John back his cassock, of which he was in absolute need. But he was only grieved that his charity had been in vain.

If it were a question of saving some one from vice, or preventing the commission of some sin, our saint spared nothing. He always managed somehow or other to find the required sum. These cases happened frequently. If it were a question of giving a dowry to a girl in danger of losing her character, or of saving her from some bad influence or perilous position, he never hesitated, even if it were a matter of paying a pension for some years. What signified money when it was a question of saving a soul?

Dom Giacomo Mosca mentions that he knew a very beautiful young girl to whom John sent regularly enough for her maintenance. "Several times he sent me on that mission," he wrote, "and told me to encourage and console her, and increase her trust and confidence in God, so that she might not be anxious for the future. She was utterly destitute, and had it not been for the canon's

daily alms she would undoubtedly have fallen into sinful courses."

Another of his favourite charities was providing beds for poor families, so that they might not be tempted to sin against modesty. When he had not a farthing left he would knock at the door of some charitable person, and borrow what was necessary; but he never delayed the return of the money. He would quote the words of St. Lawrence Giustiniani, who said, "I have always a sure and certain hope of being able to repay the debts contracted for the urgent needs of the poor, for this hope is in Jesus Christ Himself, for whom I have borrowed it." He was very anxious that the poor should be decently dressed, and if he had nothing left to give them he would strip himself of everything he could. He always remembered the words spoken by Father Galluzzi when he was still a student at the Roman College: "Ah, my dear children, give all the alms you possibly can; you never can imagine the amount of misery there is in this world; but by your alms you might prevent many sins."

The canon's enormous charities used to amaze his friends. "He gave with greater liberality than any of our princes," exclaimed Father Tavani. When his own slender resources were exhausted he would go round and beg of the rich from door to door. But when he became better known, certain charitable persons sent him weekly large sums on purpose for distribution. His reputation became so great, both for liberality and discretion, that the rectors of the different parishes hastened to him with all their worst cases, so that he might obtain help for them, which he invariably succeeded in doing.

Among his most generous benefactors in this manner was Isabella Duchess Strozzi. This noble lady was an example to all the great patricians in Rome. Feeling certain that in the hands of our saint her money would be better bestowed than in any other way, she gave everything through him. One of her letters to him was found among his papers, which ran as follows: "His reverence Canon de Rossi is entreated to address himself to the writer every time when, through the judicious employment of money, an offence against God may be averted. If he were to refuse to do this from any false delicacy as regards herself, the said person will consider it a sin binding on his own conscience; for by not accepting her offer he would refuse to hinder a possible sin, or to pay the debts of one to whom riches have been entrusted for no other purpose. Pray for me."

The duchess thus endeavoured to break down all barriers to his charity, and prevent his ever fearing to weary or annoy her by his petitions, and at her death she left him a large sum of money for the same purpose.

The abuses which were sometimes made of people's charity were not, in John Baptist's eyes, a sufficient motive for stopping them. One day, in the depth of winter, he was walking in the town with Dom Nicolas Monzoni, when they met a number of men half naked, shivering with cold, and exciting the compassion of the passers-by. Dom Nicolas expressed his surprise at seeing such misery in Rome, where there were such a number of rich people who ought to look after them. "It is not from want of charity," replied our saint; "I have very often myself clothed these very men, but they sell what is

given to them in order to trade upon the benevolence of the public. If they be thus exposed to the cold it is their own fault." But then he added immediately, "But because these men abuse our charity that is no reason why we should refuse alms to others. We must always hope to relieve some who are really in want, and then our conscience will be at rest."

The greater portion of the alms given to our saint were distributed by him to the sick poor in their own houses, who were often entirely destitute. He would pay for their medicines and the doctor, and procure for them all needful food. This charity alone mounted up to a very large sum.

Very often his charities were rewarded by positive miracles. A poor woman of Celdomare had a certain quantity of wheat which she had kept for seed; but unaccountably the grain became corrupt, and she had had nothing but crops of bad corn for three years, of which she could make no use. Our saint was giving a mission in that neighbourhood. The poor woman, in despair, came to find Dom Leopold Manzocchi, John's companion, and implored him to induce our saint to come and bless her barn, convinced that if he did so, her troubles would be at an end. Dom Manzocchi, without telling John what was expected of him, simply asked him to do what the poor woman wished for. He did it at once, and at the same time spoke a few words to the woman on the way in which she also should bring forth good fruit from the seed sown in her heart. The poor woman took the corn which had been blessed, and sowed it in her field. The result was the most magnificent crop that ever was seen, which was attested by numberless witnesses. This event was rapidly

made known in the country, and added greatly to our saint's reputation; and what is certain is, that the smallest thing done by him for the poor, thanks to his own personal holiness and purity of intention, was precious in the eyes of Him whom he served, and who was pleased thus to reward him by special and totally unexpected graces.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### The Purity and Mortification of de Rossi.

FROM his earliest years John Baptist de Rossi was remarked for his excessive love of purity. Later on, as the disciple of St. Louis of Gonzaga, at the Roman College, he showed a prudence in guarding that great virtue worthy of his saintly model. He adopted certain safeguards, from which he never swerved, and though men of the world may laugh at them, they are yet the only method by which temptations can be avoided. To guard our senses and our eyes is the first thing needful, and our saint did not fail to observe scrupulously that first rule in the spiritual life.

"I always remarked," affirmed one witness, "the extreme modesty of his looks, whether when out walking, or if in company with women. Up to the end of his life his half closed eyes gave him the look of a young novice in a religious order."

He did not think it necessary to take only common

precautions; he adopted a way of life which might be called heroic and angelic. At college he was called "the angel," or "the new Louis Gonzaga," and his companions used laughingly to declare, "that he never saw anything of a woman save her shoes." His reserve became even more remarkable when he had been ordained priest. "I understand," he would say, "that sometimes a man may meet a woman's eyes, but I cannot excuse his not withdrawing them at once. Depend upon it that the face of a woman can never without danger be studied by a man."

And he practised what he preached, not only with the young and beautiful, but also with those advanced in age. A poor old deformed woman who did his washing whilst he was at St. Mary in Cosmedin affirms that he never once looked her in the face during the nine years she worked for him. One of the canons used to take him to see his mother, who was old and infirm, to hear her confession, and console and encourage her. John used to be received by her daughter, the canon's sister. He was naturally obliged to speak to her with politeness and kindness, but he always did so with his eyes cast down. This the young girl remarked, and said to her brother, "I cannot make out why Canon de Rossi never looks at me when he speaks; I never saw any other man act like that."

Following the example of St. Francis of Sales, he never would let women come into his own room. But the poor women, knowing his charity, would knock at his door, and insist on being admitted. One wanted a bed, another clothing, a third food, &c., &c. John used to send a man to tell them he would do all in his power to satisfy them:

but that he could not let them into his room, or allow them to wait on the staircase.

Once he was staying in the country with a friend of his for change of air, when, just as he was going out for a walk, he met at the door one of his old Roman penitents, who was married in the neighbourhood, and who had come over to pay him a visit. Taken thus unexpectedly, John was very much puzzled what to do, for he did not like to ask her into his room, nor could he send her away in so rude and disobliging a manner. Fortunately his friend came to the rescue, and drawing the lady into the sitting-room, entered into conversation with her. John remained standing and talking to her as long as civility required, and then left her, she being charmed, as well as his host, with his quiet dignity and modesty.

It is a common custom in Italy to kiss the hands of priests, representing, as they do, Jesus Christ, and venerable from having not only received holy unction, but from being permitted to handle each day the Sacred Host.

Ordinarily John would not allow women to kiss his hand, and when it was unavoidable he did it with evident repugnance. Even with men he permitted it reluctantly, and especially disliked it when he felt his hand pressed with unusual warmth. However, he was very careful not to hurt people's feelings in the matter, and would put them off now and then in a playful manner. On one occasion, his hand being seized by a friend, he cried out, smiling, "Take care, I have just come from the hospital of St. Gallicano, and I might bring you an infectious disease." His friend drew back his hand quickly enough, though not



quite sure whether it was not a "ruse" on the canon's part to escape the compliment.

The curious thing was that this extreme reserve, which would seem excessive and over-strained in any one else, never excited surprise in his case, so perfectly natural did it appear.

John was staying with his friend, Canon Chiari, when he was one day attacked by his terrible malady, and rolled on the floor without consciousness. All the family rushed to his assistance, and the sister and housekeeper of the canon carried him to the nearest bed, and in order to enable him to breathe with greater facility, they proceeded partially to undress him. When he came to himself and opened his eyes, he saw directly what had happened. Calling the canon, he implored him to send away the two women, saying that he was very grateful, but that he could not be nursed by them, and for days after the thought that he had been undressed by women made him quite inconsolable.

During the missions, when the missionaries had to share one room, he was careful never to go to bed till the others were asleep, and always put out the light before retiring himself, while he was up and dressed before day, and saying his prayers before his companions were awake. This sensitive modesty was apparent in all his actions. In his dreadful illnesses he always dispensed with the servant's help when he possibly could, and arranged a cord so that he might draw himself up without calling for assistance. Even the doctors found it almost impossible to examine him properly. In fact, it might be said of him, as of St. Francis of Sales, who, being once watched in his

bedroom by the Bishop of Belley, the latter affirmed "that he had been more edified thus than even by his reserve in public;" and the same evidence was given by Dom Niccola Bonucci, who, when the canon was one day resting at St. John Lateran's, looked at him through the keyhole.

Rome did not fail to profit by such an example, and a sermon which he one day preached at St. Mary in Cosmedin against obscene pictures produced the most extraordinary results, many of the owners bringing them to him to burn. On another occasion, at a public festa, a very objectionable picture was exhibited. John heard of the scandal, rushed off to the cardinal-vicar, and never rested till the picture had been removed. "If the cardinal had not listened to me," he said, "I should have gone off to the Pope himself."

Purity and mortification are sister virtues, and one is a necessary condition of the other. John had become so completely master of his passions that they were in him extinct, and so continual was his watchfulness that it was impossible to find in him the shadow of a defect.

He who at fifteen had imposed upon himself, as we have seen, the penance of not speaking, and who had the courage in a Roman summer to give up drinking, except what was absolutely necessary, was not likely to fail in personal mortification. He never advised extraordinary corporal penances, however, especially without the distinct leave of a confessor, having himself suffered so severely from neglecting prudence in that particular. There is no doubt that his directors refused him in later life all kinds of austerities, owing to his state of health.

But he never omitted any small opportunity of mortifying his tastes and appetite. He never made but one good meal in the middle of the day, and though supper was served he rarely touched it. If anything more delicate than usual was cooked for him he would never eat it. He would take the first dish that was brought to him and eat that, refusing everything that came after. Never did he complain if a thing was badly cooked, although every one might be abusing it round him. One day the cook by accident had emptied a whole cellar full of salt into the soup. John eat it quietly, and never said a word. His neighbour asked him why he didn't leave it, like the others. "Why?" he replied, gaily; "but is not salt an indication of wisdom?"

He dined one day with Cardinal Castelli, when a fine fish was put on the table, and the cardinal, who wished to do him honour, and had placed him in consequence on his right hand, helped him first. John began to eat the fish, and went on doing so, when the cardinal, who had just helped himself, uttered a cry of horror. The fish was bad, and the taste horrible. He told the servant instantly to take away John's plate, and was horrified at his having eaten so much of it. "But I found it very tender," said John, smiling, and trying to excuse himself.

Another day Dom Dominic Cucumos received him at his house, and as the heat was overpowering, forced him to accept a glass of old Syracuse wine. To his dismay our saint proceeded to deluge it with water, and when reproached for spoiling such a rare and excellent beverage, John only answered gaily, "Better to spoil it than to be spoilt oneself by it."

But it was not only in eating and drinking that he mortified himself. At the Trinità he would not let the servant make his bed oftener than once a week. As the man thought this a most extraordinary idea, John tried to invent a reason for it. "You see, one of my shoulders grows out, and my hump is easier when it finds a hole where it is used to rest." After the terrible fatigues of his day one might have thought that a good bed was a very legitimate comfort, and a refreshing sleep absolutely necessary. But even in this he found a means of mortifying himself, to make up for his inability to bear severer penances. Such is the way in which the pious scholar of the Roman College continued all his life to imitate his model, St. Louis of Gonzaga.

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## CHAPTER V.

### The other Virtues of John Baptist de Rossi.

TO enumerate the rest of John Baptist's virtues we have only to speak of his extraordinary humility, sweetness and prudence.

Humility, which consists in the conviction of our own weaknesses, is the foundation of all holiness. This solid basis was not wanting to our saint's character. In fact, his biographers speak of it as the most salient point in it. One writes: "He had the humblest opinion of himself, and although he worked such miracles in the way of conver-

sions, I never heard him speak of them, or praise himself even in the smallest things. In his presence, I hardly ever dared approve of what he had done; for we were so intimate that I knew I should at once incur his displeasure. He used to labour for souls with the greatest secrecy, and was annoyed when any one found him out."

"Another extraordinary sign of humility was the way in which he would behave when there was any public discussion on points of theology; unless forced to speak he appeared so incapable and so ignorant that strangers would pity him. Yet no one had a more powerful mind or a clearer judgment in such matters. It was only in private, as for instance, at dinner at the Trinità dei Pellegrini, where it is the custom to propose a case of conscience, that he consented to speak, and then did so with such clearness and force of reasoning as to astonish his hearers; for he quoted the opinions of the greatest theologians and doctors of the Church, as if he had spent his whole life in studying them."

We have seen the difficulty he made in accepting the canonry, persuaded that he would do much better as a simple priest. And in all the letters he wrote afterwards, he never would sign himself thus or add his title. He detested any kind of pretension, and would accept no particular honour. In public ceremonies he would always choose the lowest place, and mix himself with the crowd, unless compelled to keep the dignity of his office.

Another witness adds: "I went one day in the month of August to St. Mary in Cosmedin to say Mass. The canon, to my dismay, took up the missal, and insisted on serving my Mass himself." It is the custom of the Church

for the canons to wear the *Cappa Magna* in winter, and the rochet in summer, under the alb. Every one knows how particular they are to wear this insignia of their dignity. But this great servant of God, in his humility, was utterly regardless of human considerations, and wherever he could procure, as he thought, with greater facility the glory of God or the salvation of a soul, he would appear like an ordinary priest.

When he renounced his canonry, he kept the privilege of his place in choir, from his love for the Church's Offices, and his veneration for the Madonna which is there exposed. His place was therefore among the canons: but he always would sit after the coadjutors. The latter resisted: so that to get his own way he would arrive first, and then install himself where he chose. He would do the same in public ceremonies. Very often the canons would implore him to preside at the Offices: but to overcome his objections they had to resort to his director to enforce obedience. When his friends expressed their annoyance and surprise at not seeing him in his proper place among the canons, he would reply, "I have resigned my canonry, and have no longer the right to appear as canon."

The same spirit of humility was visible in all his actions. One day he was reproached for killing himself with work. "My death would be of no importance to any one," he replied, smiling, "for I am old and useless."

At the Trinità dei Pellegrini, as at St. Mary in Cosmedin, he always took the lowest place. Although not attached to the house in any capacity, he was as regular as the chaplains in the performance of every duty. He

always put himself at the disposal of the other priests. He would only say Mass at the hours and at the altars which were appointed for him, and never complained of the frequent inconvenience which such an arrangement imposed upon him.

Whilst every one admired his profound experience and wonderful prudence, he himself shrank from ever expressing his opinion or giving advice. In fact, much more might have been remembered or written down of his sayings if he had not always been so careful to hide his ability and virtue. He loved to be unknown and counted as nobody. In the hospitals he would perform the meanest and most loathsome offices, in the teeth of all human respect, and he loved to do such things, as they so often brought about the conversion of sinners. In the street he was continually seen walking with beggars, with sailors, and with dirty or miserably dressed peasants. He treated them with a gentle familiarity, which won all their hearts, and would even take them by the arm when he wanted to speak to them with greater intimacy. It may be supposed that some among these men were coarse enough to take advantage of this kindness; but it was remarked that he never gave any sign of anger or impatience at their rudeness, or even at the abuse he sometimes met with. He would even join in the ridicule which some would throw on his personal appearance, so as to be considered as a man of no value or importance. But, on the other hand, if any one praised him, especially in public, he was extremely annoyed. He used to beg of them to stop, and not to say things of which they knew nothing. At St. Galla, on one occasion, before a large

auditory, a priest began to eulogise his conduct. The canon interrupted him, and exclaimed, "Add to my qualities that I am the confessor of the hangman!" who, being naturally the man most odious to and despised by the people, would (he thought) make his confessor appear the most miserable and the lowest of his kind.

Some one was expressing his astonishment and admiration that without having had time to study such and such works, he yet could preach such learned sermons and write such able treatises. "Before preaching or writing," he said, "I always make my poor people pray; they, in consequence, are the real authors of what I do or say." Once, when speaking to an intimate priest-friend of some wonderful instances of God's mercy towards sinners, brought about by his means, he added, "I tell this to you to show how God alone works in us, and suggests things to us of which we should be utterly incapable ourselves."

A few days before his death a member of the Trinità became his secretary, and John dictated a letter to him, the contents of which we do not know, but in which he made allusion to himself in such humiliating terms that the priest was on the point of stopping several times and remonstrating with him. When it was finished John said, "Well, do you think the letter will do?" "But no," exclaimed the astonished secretary; "it is a total annihilation of yourself." "Never mind, it is the truth," answered our saint, and he insisted on the letter being sent just as it was.

From this extraordinary humility arose his extreme gentleness with regard to others. Following in the steps of his model, St. Francis of Sales, he was always full of



kindness and amiability. The sweetness of his character was shown in his smile, which was so winning that it often touched the hardest hearts, and filled all who came near him with confidence and peace.

In his exterior he had nothing hard or austere. He was always gay and bright in manner; his conversation was full of fun, often indeed sparkling with wit; but never in one single instance wanting in charity. Every one could have access to him, rich or poor, high or lowly, old or young, all were received with the same paternal kindness. Sometimes his visitors, who were delighted to have an opportunity of talking with our saint, would stay an unconscionable time. Unless obliged to cut short the interview from some imperative engagement, John continued to talk and to listen, and never showed any *ennui* or impatience; but sometimes he would own to his confidants afterwards that such or such a visitor had made him lose much precious time. This condescension on his part was so well known that people came in crowds to consult him, to entreat him to settle their quarrels, or to help them in their various troubles. He gave as much attention to the poor as to the rich, in fact the former had generally the preference. Above all, he urged patience and gentleness on confessors, and often quoted the story of the poor man who had been driven away from the confessional by the harshness of a priest, who had simply told him "To go away, as he was already damned," and whom he had had such difficulty, with the help of the Venerable Parisi, in bringing back to his duties. He used to implore young priests to remember the conduct of our Lord towards the Samaritan, and to act accordingly. And he objected as

strongly to preachers terrifying their hearers by dwelling solely on the judgments of God. Writing to a priest on this subject, he says: "We can have but these two ends in view, the glory of God and the salvation of souls. But depend upon it, we shall never arrive at either without gentleness and sweetness, united with constancy. Our dear Lord and Master conquered the world by humility and patience, joined with love, and we pretend to imitate Him by severity and threats of divine vengeance. Let us act like Him, and we shall see far happier results."

John's own gentleness led also to his exceeding docility of character. Unless there were anything wrong or doubtful in what was proposed he would always place himself at the disposal of the people he was with, and sacrificed his own tastes without a moment's hesitation. For this reason one of his intimate friends used to say that "you could lead him with a thread." Although he disliked games, yet, whenever he thought he could do good by joining in them, he did so, and that so thoroughly that no one would believe he did not enjoy them. In this he followed the example of St. Charles Borromeo, who would play at cards (which he hated) with the Swiss guards, and St. Francis Xavier with the sailors on board ship: and so John would play with the children, or the young clerics of St. Galla in their expeditions into the country or elsewhere.

It is not necessary to enter into further details of his virtue in this respect, for his whole life was an example to those around him, although apparently so hidden, so simple, and, what some men might call so common-place. But to do the common things of every day in a perfect

manner, what more is needed to become a great saint? We will only add a few words more on his extraordinary *prudence*.

In spite of his great horror of sin, and his intense desire to start various new schemes to avert it, he never did anything hastily. Before beginning any fresh work, or trying to remedy any evil, he would first go carefully into the whole question, find out the root of the evil, listen to what was said on all sides, and then employ only the means most suited to the occasion, to the persons, or to the circumstances of the case. He never acted without extraordinary discretion, patience, and prayer, and by these means his undertakings almost invariably succeeded when others failed.

When he left Rome on his different missions he begged one of his priests to take charge of the most pressing cases among his poor, and to him he would write constantly, advising gentleness in all difficult cases, and above all, no violence or precipitation, and if any doubts arose to refer them to certain persons on whose calm judgment he could rely. Everywhere the extraordinary prudence of John Baptist inspired confidence. The Archdeacon of Albano declared that he never undertook any important act without consulting him, and that to follow his advice ensured success. "Whenever I have consulted Canon de Rossi," wrote another eminent ecclesiastic, "whether upon cases in the confessional, or matters personal to myself, I have always found him the most discreet and enlightened of guides, and one who made everything clear to me at once; so that, relying on his judgment, I had no hesitation

in acting, and I never was mistaken in thus obeying his wise counsels."

Enough has been said of this, the crown of all virtues. We must come now to the detail of the sufferings which brought this perfect life to a close.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### His Terrible Sufferings.

HIS FRAIL HEALTH.—HIS PATIENCE UNDER CONTINUAL SUFFERING.—HIS LAST JOURNEY TO L'ABICCIA.—HIS FAREWELL TO THE BASILICA OF ST. MARY IN COSMEDIN.—HIS MALADY RETURNS WITH GREATER VIOLENCE.

IT is impossible to read the life of Canon de Rossi without wondering how he could accomplish such innumerable good works in so short a time, but our wonder increases when we bear in mind that this man was a constant invalid, and at times in a state of fearful suffering. His appearance alone showed how much he had to bear. We have already alluded to the fearful change in his appearance when that terrible malady attacked him as a young man. Later on his feeble body became more and more emaciated: his fresh complexion became of the whiteness of wax, and under his eyes were deep lines left by pain and continual suffering. Yet his eyes were still full of fire, and a sweet smile expressed the peace which

filled his soul. This smile was often quite enough to console the sick and calm the greatest griefs. It seemed to transfigure his whole face with a kind of celestial beauty. In his last years a fringe of snow-white hair made a kind of aureole to this sweet face, which might well be called "angelic."

Besides the frequent attacks of his malady, he suffered constant pain, and was reduced to the last stage of weakness. All intellectual work was forbidden him. Writing cost him so much that he was obliged to give it up, as it invariably brought on a crisis of his malady, so that the few letters which have been handed down to us are only dictated and signed by him, and were written by friends, who were too glad to act as his secretaries. Sometimes he could not even read the letters which were addressed to him. His weak stomach could not bear any ordinary food, hence his extreme thinness. If he eat in the middle of the day a little more than usual, violent headaches followed, which lasted for hours. We can fancy what courage it required for him to go on just the same with his labours among the poor and in the confessional. In the evening he took so little that it could not be called supper, and very often he touched nothing. No one ever heard him complain, however, of his want of appetite, and he used to sit at table with his companions and keep up an animated conversation, so that no one might find out he was suffering. In fact, he was in such a state of health that he ought to have been spared every kind of fatigue, and the care of such a fragile frame would have been to most men a sufficient occupation and an excuse for any amount of self-indulgence; but, on the contrary, he was not only

the most indefatigable of the Roman priests, but he was really the apostle of Rome, and his zeal was such that he seemed to forget that he had a body at all, so unwearied was he in his labours, so superhuman in his self-denial.

This delicate organization and sickly temperament pre-disposed him also to take every prevailing epidemic. Fever is mistress of Rome at certain seasons, and he caught it on four or five occasions while visiting the sick, and was several times in danger of death. In 1758 his end seemed so near that Mass was interrupted at the altar of the Blessed Sacrament to bring him holy Viaticum, the doctor thinking he would die before the Mass was finished.

Other painful internal maladies supervened to test both his patience and his courage, but however acute might be his sufferings, every one who came to see him found him not only resigned, but joyous. His conformity to the will of God was so perfect that he never saw in anything but the pleasure of his Divine Master. Sickness or health, both could be turned to the glory of God and the salvation of souls. In that very illness of 1758, a priest, knowing his devotion to St. Louis of Gonzaga, gave him a relic of the saint to kiss. John said out loud instantly the following prayer: "By the merits of this glorious saint, let us pray Jesus Christ our Redeemer to restore me to health, if I may still labour for the good of souls, the relief of the poor, and for His greater glory; if not, it is useless for me to live any longer." Our Lord had still work for His faithful servant to do, and heard the prayers of the poor on his behalf. He raised him up again, and for six years longer John laboured more indefatigably than ever to save sinners. True patience is shown more remarkably

in bearing continual ill-health than short and sharp pain. Our saint's life might be called a long and lingering martyrdom, yet no complaint ever escaped him; his peace and resignation were unalterable. Count Tenderini, who knew him so intimately, and was with him during one of his worst illnesses in 1720, declared that he seemed positively insensible to suffering; yet the doctors all declared that the malady under which he was labouring must necessarily cause him acute agony. The priests and the servants at the Trinità who waited upon him at such times, declared unanimously that not only he never uttered a cry or a groan of pain, but that in his long and tedious convalescence he never showed any signs of being weary or bored.

But there was something more than patience and heroism in his way of bearing his illnesses, and that was an inexplicable joy, which no pain seemed to take away from him. Instead of sadness and depression, those about him, or who came to see him, were amazed at his playfulness, his sallies of wit, and the way in which he talked of everything except his own sufferings. People used to come to sympathize with and console him, and found, when they came away, that they had forgotten the object of their visit, and had never said a word to him about his health, while he had led them on to talk of themselves, and had encouraged and comforted them in their troubles, instead of himself seeking for or accepting consolation. He was always most considerate towards his nurses, never disturbing them when he could possibly avoid it. At the Trinità dei Pellegrini an iron bar is still shown above his bed, to which he had a strong cord put, by which he could

lift himself up without calling any one to help him, or being touched. But, docile as a child, he submitted to everything that was necessary. It was the moment to renounce all personal will; Jesus on the cross was ever before his eyes, and his conduct was regulated on this divine model.

But in spite of all the care of his devoted nurses the end of our saint was at hand. His strength gave way altogether; his swelled legs could hardly bear the weight of his feeble body, bowed down as it was by the burden of sufferings and of incessant toil. In 1763 an increase in many of the worst symptoms of his malady destroyed all hopes of his being spared much longer. But as country air had been found several times to have a magical effect upon him, the doctors determined to try this remedy once more, and John, as usual, submitted to their decision. They first thought of Rocca di Papa, that beautiful village perched on the summit of the Alban hills. But they were afraid that, as he was so well known and beloved by the inhabitants, they would never leave him in peace; so that they finally chose l'Ariccia, near Albano, where he was less known.

Our saint himself had no illusions as to his state, and felt that he was dying. Before starting he insisted on making a retreat with the Lazarist Fathers at the mission house, to prepare himself for the last dread passage. It was the last retreat of his life, for the one he began before the feast of St. Philip Neri was ended in heaven.

After a general confession he was carried to l'Ariccia. But he found no relief from the change; on the contrary, his cruel malady returned with greater violence, and



increased his weakness. Feeling death drawing near, he implored to be taken back to Rome, and to the Trinità dei Pellegrini, that he might expire in the arms of the fathers whom he had loved as brothers.

His wishes were at once complied with, and he was brought back to Rome about the middle of October. At first there was a slight amelioration in his condition. He was able to hear the confessions of those who came to him, and once or twice, when he felt a little better, he would drag himself to the bedside of the sick poor who lived near, in order to strengthen and console them. His zeal had not diminished, and he seemed determined to realize the words he had once spoken, "As long as I have a breath left in my body I will go wherever I am wanted." Priests succeeded one another hourly in his room. Feeling themselves on the eve of losing one who had so long been their father and their guide, they strove to make the most of those last precious days, and to obtain all the instruction and advice they could from his dying lips.

On the 8th September, 1763, the feast of the Nativity of our Lady, John determined to say Mass once more in that Basilica of St. Mary in Cosmedin, which was so dear to him, and venerate for the last time his favourite Madonna. The feast itself was magnificent; his presence added to the crowds that flocked that day to the church. As he dragged himself painfully towards the sacristy a bevy of poor followed him, expressing their joy and veneration, and their delight at seeing him again; John had a kind word for every one, and listened to their good wishes with a smiling countenance. But after Mass, when they followed him, as it were, in procession back to the Trinità, re-

peating out loud their hopes and prayers for his recovery, he stopped, and turning round to them with his usual sweet smile, said: "My dear good people, do not flatter yourselves with false hopes, for this is the last time I shall say Mass in that holy basilica."

His biographers state that he had a thorough knowledge of the day of his death. In the month of December he went to see Canon Dom Antonio Coselli, his confessor, whose sister had long been in a dangerous state. He spoke to her with unusual earnestness and fervour, exhorting her to bear her sufferings with courage, and above all to make a daily preparation for death. "Good-bye," he added, in taking leaving of her, "take courage, our turn will come very soon. Next year we shall both of us go home." The sick lady died in the month of January, 1764, and John in the month of May following.

A fresh attack, more serious than any that had preceded it, followed his return from l'Ariccia. He had consented, at last, to rest a little longer in the morning, and did not get up till half-past six; after his hours' meditation, and half an hour's preparation for his Mass, some one came to fetch him and to lead him down to the little private chapel of the hospital. On the 27th December, the servant knocked as usual at eight o'clock at his door, but he did not answer; he called loudly, but in vain. Alarmed at this the man flew to summon some of the priests of the house, who ran and opened his door, and to their sorrow and dismay, found him lying half dressed and unconscious on the floor by the side of his bed; he appeared, in fact, to be dead, his face was livid and his body like ice. They drew near and found that he still breathed, so that they re-

placed him on his bed, summoned three of the best doctors, and did all they could to restore consciousness, but in vain. At last, after trying the strongest remedies for three or four hours, he opened his eyes and tried to speak a few words, though with great difficulty. They brought him holy viaticum, and at the sight of his Lord our saint was roused to such an expression of faith and love that every one was moved to tears. After having received it, he remained immovable, and with his eyes closed, so that it seemed as if life were extinct. The sacrament of Extreme Unction was administered, and then again John seemed to revive, and answered the responses to the prayers. Every one thought his last hour was at hand, but, strange to say, after the administration of the last Sacraments, he became visibly better, and the next day was almost out of danger. As soon as he had recovered the free use of his speech, the holy man asked pardon for all the trouble he had so involuntarily caused his assistants. He asked special forgiveness of the servant who used to take him to say his mass in the chapel, but he added to them all: "I hope soon I shall no longer make such demands upon your charity, for I am sure to die before long." He begged every one to thank God, who had not allowed him to die without the last Sacraments. After this, for two or three months he was still able to receive penitents in his room, and give counsel and advice to those who sought it. But it was evident to all that his last hour was at hand, and that he would soon be called to receive the reward of his labours.

His sufferings indeed deserved a special crown. They formed a prominent feature in his life, and greatly en-

hanced the value of his work. He had, some years before, preached a mission at Bracciano, a little town about forty kilometers to the north of Rome. The parish priest of that place had had constant intercourse with him during that time, and had conceived a very high idea of his sanctity; finally he became one of his intimate friends and sought his advice on every occasion. On the 23rd of May, 1764, in a kind of vision, which still was not sleep, this same priest saw a beautiful illuminated cross in the air. Its brightness lit up an innumerable crowd of people, who, prostrate before it, were watching it with profound respect and admiration, as if in expectation of some great event. The priest asked one who was kneeling before the cross what the apparition meant? The answer, given in a loud and harmonious voice, was as follows: "It is thus that the Son of God is preparing to honour and receive one who has faithfully served Him, and who is now about to have his reward." After these words the vision disappeared, and the priest roused himself to try and understand what it meant. He was afraid that it was only a dream, and feared to be the victim of some illusion. However, he wrote down the day and hour, and all particulars, and all day long this vision was before him, filling his thoughts and mind. Towards evening, a traveller coming from Rome, brought him the news of the death of the holy canon. He eagerly enquired the time, and it came out that at the very moment when the priest had seen the radiant cross in the heavens, John Baptist, with his eyes fixed on the crucifix, had sweetly fallen asleep in the Lord. His friend could have no reasonable doubt that he had left this suffering life to enter into the kingdom of God's glory in heaven.

In the beautiful picture representing our saint, which is now in the Vatican, and which was given to that great and holy pope Pius IX., at the time of Canon de Rossi's beatification, the holy man is represented as meeting this cross, which floods him with celestial light. Perhaps God wished thereby to signify how acceptable to Him had been the many years of John Baptist's sufferings, so nobly and heroically borne. After having thus carried the cross of suffering and self-denial through so long a pilgrimage, our saint was to receive one of beauty and of light, in the brilliancy of which our Lord Himself would be revealed to him, and be for ever his joy and his exceeding great reward.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### The Death of Canon de Rossi.

JOHN BAPTIST EXPECTS DEATH WITH CONFIDENCE AND CALMNESS.

—HIS LOVE FOR THE POOR, AND HIS PIETY ON HIS DEATH-BED.

—HE DISTRIBUTES THE POOR LITTLE THINGS WHICH REMAIN TO HIM.—THE NOVENA OF ST. PHILIP.—LAST ATTACK.—HIS SOLEMN OBSEQUIES.—HIS EPITAPH.

ON the 17th June, 1763, that is, less than a year before his death, John Baptist gave his last address to the priests of St. Galla. It was his real farewell, for soon after, his illness returned with such violence, and the attacks became so frequent, that he could no longer attempt

to preach. In this conference our saint treated his favourite subject: "*On the zeal which priests should have for the salvation of souls, and especially the souls of the poor.*" He concluded with these words:

"What amount of merit shall we not gain if we devote ourselves thus to the well-being of our poor neighbours! Perhaps that may happen to us which we read of in the life of a monk in the East. Unfortunately this man had fallen into temptation, and was on his way to commit a grave sin, but on his road he met his superior, who ordered him to go at once and preach in a neighbouring convent, where the priest had failed to appear in time. The guilty monk would fain have escaped, but was compelled to obey: seeing that he could not avoid this burden, he resolved to take it up courageously, and preached with real zeal and devotion. This sermon brought forth extraordinary fruits, and God blessed it by bringing it home first to the preacher himself. His eyes were suddenly opened to see the precipice on the edge of which he was standing: he repented himself of his bad purpose, returned to his monastery, and led ever after a most edifying life. So you see that God shows a special mercy towards those who labour for the salvation of their brethren. He will be generous to us in proportion as we have been generous towards others.

"In the life of St. Andrea Avellino we read that he was one day sent for in hot haste to hear the confession of a sick man. The messenger was full of anxiety and fear lest the father should be too late, and implored him to make haste, as the salvation of his friend depended upon it. The zeal of the messenger struck the saint, who,

suddenly enlightened from above, exclaimed: 'But you also, my brother, need sadly to make a good confession yourself.' It was quite true, and the man, struck to the heart, followed the saint's advice, and made a general confession. God thus rewarded him for the anxiety he had shown to procure the salvation of his sick friend, and this St. Andrea told him afterwards. I was once asked if I had a strong hope of salvation, and on what reasons my hopes were grounded. I replied that my hope was strong, and my confidence great, because I had always devoted myself to the poor, and to those who were abandoned by every one else. If by the grace of God I have succeeded in bringing back one or other of these souls, it seems to me that God has undertaken on His part to save me. This poor soul, which has been rescued and restored to Him, will it not intercede for me? Courage, then, dear brethren, and let our zeal for the service of the poor be strengthened and inflamed by this one thought."

Our saint, therefore, did not fear death. He expected it, and waited for it without any terror; as the soldier who dies on the rampart he has stormed in face of the enemy. A canon was one day speaking to him of the fears which assailed him when he thought of death, and still more of damnation. "We all feel this naturally," replied John; "I have also passed through these moments of terror, but when I think of all I have tried to do for the poor, peace and confidence come back to me. My hope is then so steadfast and strong that I feel as if I were already in paradise. Devote yourself, therefore, to doing good to the very poor, and I assure you your fears will then pass away."

In the month of May, 1764, his illness increased, and his attacks came on more frequently. His confessor, Dom Antonio Coselli, (Rector of St. Thomas à *Cenci*,) was with him on one of these occasions. When he regained his consciousness he begged at once to make a general confession, which he did with quiet calmness. Dom Antonio suggested various pious thoughts to him, and advised him to accept death with joy, as the means of bringing him into the presence of God. "I look upon death," replied John, "without fear and without regret. I believe this feeling is a special grace from God, Who will have mercy upon me, because He knows I have always treated His poor with such special affection."

Spring was come, but it brought no increase of strength to the dying saint. The purer air might, the doctors thought, have done him good, but his own room was bad and unhealthy, being close to the Tiber, which made it damp, and the only window opened into a narrow court, where the air was bad and close. John was accordingly moved, sorely against his will, to the house of a friend, a lawyer named Stephen Palliani, who had an apartment near the Quattro Fontane, built on a hill, surrounded by a garden, and where the air was always fresh and sweet. Our saint found himself there with devoted friends, and surrounded with every comfort which their delicate affection could suggest; but in spite of all that his state became daily worse, and finally he entreated to be taken back to the Trinità. His sufferings now became so great that not only was he obliged to give up saying Mass, but he could not even receive daily communion, which was a terrible privation to him. In the midst of it all, however, his



heart was still full of his poor. That year, 1764, was a terrible one for them. There was almost a famine in the land, and the starving peasants flocked into Rome in serried masses. Certain zealous priests, encouraged by our saint, determined to open a new hospital for women, for the one of St. Louis, which John had founded near St. Galla, had become entirely insufficient. It was necessary to raise a large sum of money for this purpose, but, thanks to John's influence, the required funds poured in quickly. Guided by his counsels, and walking in his steps, these young priests worked wonders. Their ardour was such that one of them, Canon Louis Strozzi, fell dangerously ill from over-work, and actually died a victim to his charity. John exclaimed, sighing, when he heard the news, "Ah, what a blessed death! As for me, I am an unprofitable servant." How gladly would he have given his life for the poor, and died, like his friend, while labouring for them. The total inaction to which he was now condemned was, for him, the most cruel of sufferings. To be no longer able to go and visit his dear children was to him a greater and more meritorious sacrifice than even his patience under physical pain. He used to envy his companions at St. Galla, who were free to carry out their apostolate. But God had so ordained it, and with this thought ever present in his mind, John cheerfully submitted to the divine will.

Two consolations remained to him. His friends, who succeeded one another without intermission by his bedside, were ever ready to be his messengers, and would write for or read out loud to him continually. They used to read the lives of the saints, especially that of St. Philip Neri, and he preferred that sort of reading to any kind of

conversation. One other great comfort to him was the recital of the rosary, which hardly ever left his poor shrunken hands. "I have been forbidden to say my office, so I make amends with this," he would say to his visitors. This rosary was a subject of continual envy to his friends, who looked upon it as a precious relic. During one of his attacks a priest, who had long coveted its possession, detached it from his wrist. The moment he recovered consciousness he found out his loss, and begged to have it back with such touching earnestness that it was instantly replaced. But then our saint had a scruple; he was afraid that he had shown too much attachment to this particular rosary, and gave it away, only asking as a favour that he might be allowed to use it up to the last.

When he felt himself about to appear before the presence of God, he looked round him, wishing to die as became one who had devoted himself entirely to the service of the poor, that is, despoiled of all earthly possessions. His riches had long since disappeared, as we know, and he had hardly left himself enough for the necessities of life. But he wished to divide the few things he had left. First, the bed on which he lay. Being told of a young girl who was engaged to be married, but who could not do so without (according to Roman custom) buying her bed, he left her his own, only reserving a few planks, of which he begged that his coffin might be made.

He had also a little table, a *prie Dieu*, one or two chairs, a breviary, the New Testament, all tattered and torn, of which he had made use all his life, two old pictures on copper without any value, and a few common prints of sacred subjects. He divided these among the priests of

the Trinità and those of St. Galla. He sent for each of them in turn, said a few burning words to encourage them to generosity in the service of God, and devotion to His poor, and then begged each to accept one of the humble little things which were all he had to leave. To the priests of St. Galla he specially addressed himself, imploring them never to neglect their duties towards the sick poor. All left him profoundly touched and impressed. We do not know what he said to each; but one of them relates the following: "He gave me his breviary, and added, 'Love God with all your heart, and live as becomes a good and holy priest.' These few words were said with such unction that, in spite of myself, I burst into tears. I could not command my voice enough to say one word of thanks, and he had to send me away himself."

As for his crucifix, which he wore during all his missions, the canon had promised it thirteen years before his death to John Baptist Camassei, the parish priest of Beragna, who had said how much he wished to possess it. The canon did not forget this promise on his deathbed, and begged one of his friends to transmit it to him after his death. Father Camassei received it as his greatest earthly treasure, and wrote shortly after, "Have I not received in this precious gift a pledge of the protection this saint will give me in heaven?"

In giving away most of these little things, John begged the recipients to carry them away at once before his death. Could voluntary detachment go further? He also announced that he had reserved a small sum of money. It was the exact cost of a poor person's funeral, which he had kept by him for a long time, and which he did not look

upon as his own, as it was "to pay," he said, "an inevitable debt;" and he particularly wished no expense to fall upon the hospital. But such were not the designs of Providence, and the funeral pomp which followed the glorious remains of our saint did not certainly enter into his humble thoughts or intentions.

What the canon found it hardest to leave were his "little poor of Jesus Christ," as he called them. During the last two months of his life he would talk of St. Galla continually, and liked to know every little detail which happened. Who had been the preacher, and what had he said? How were the poor getting on? Were they content and happy? These and the like questions were ever on his lips. He added very often, addressing the young priests, "How happy you are to be able to serve the poor! it was such a joy to me!" The thought that he was condemned to complete inaction, and could no longer do anything for them, used sometimes to make him cry bitterly.

It was the 17th May, the day when the novena always begins in Rome, before the feast of St. Philip Neri. John Baptist wished to join the whole town in making a special retreat; he said he would ask the saint to give him strength enough to say mass once more on his feast. All his life long the canon had devoted this particular period to special exercises of prayer and acts of virtue, and never had he shown such fervour as now. It was his final preparation for death. On all sides prayers were offered up in union with his and for his intention. During these days he was able to get up several times, and had himself carried into the chapel of the hospital, where he spent as much

time as his strength would permit. St. Philip did not grant his prayer; but obtained for him a far higher grace, that of seeing on that day his Lord, not under the Eucharistic veils, but face to face in all the beauty of His Divine majesty.

On the 21st of May, 1764, towards evening, our saint became suddenly worse. Violent pains and a great oppression in his breathing too clearly showed that a fresh attack was imminent. His face became deadly pale, his limbs stiff and cold, and his sufferings were terrible to witness. He was carried to his bed, and never spoke a word, being as it were plunged in profound meditation; a little later, he said he was ready to see any of his penitents who wished to speak to him. He spoke a few words to John Mary Toietti, and added as he left him: "Pray for me that I may still say mass on St. Philip's feast-day." And the brightest smile passed over his face. Did he feel that death was at hand, and was he only playfully alluding to the hope he had conceived and which was not to be realised? Contrary to his usual habit, he begged then to be left alone with God; and soon became absorbed in a kind of meditation which no one liked to disturb.

A little later, however, Dom Antonio Coselli, his confessor, and Dom Joseph Gasperoni, a very old friend of our saint's, came by turns into his room. On seeing them, John partly raised himself in the bed, and asked them how the poor women were going on who had been sheltered in the hospital of St. Louis, and in the new asylum which had been recently opened. He asked in the same way various questions about the poor people in St. Galla. These were his last words, and they were consecrated to

the poor, and worthy of him who was called, "The Father of the miserable."

Hardly were they spoken, however, than another fearful attack came on, the last, but also the most terrible. For two long hours, without an instant's intermission, a convulsive trembling came over his whole body, his head and arms especially were as if violently shaken. His friends could only look on with grief and compassion, and marvel how he could resist such frightful convulsions. Blood poured in torrents from his mouth, which was contracted and half open, and added to the misery of the lookers-on, who could do nothing whatever to help him save by prayer.

At last these frightful convulsions ceased; but John remained as one dead. His head was turned towards his *prie Dieu*, and his eyes, wide open, were fixed on the crucifix. All of a sudden a beautiful smile came over his face, with an almost extatic expression, and until his last hour he remained thus in contemplation of the Crucified One, without answering any questions, his eyes remaining fixed and brilliant. Had he a vision of that glorious cross which his friend saw, and which was to be his guide to heaven?

Thus passed all the day of the 22nd of May. Towards evening, the sick man suddenly tried to throw himself back, and an expression of great terror came over his face, though his eyes were still fixed on the crucifix. One of his attendants feared that another convulsion was coming on: but Dom Giacomo Costa, who knew the malice of our infernal enemy, especially at the moment of death, hastily took some holy water, with which he sprinkled our saint

and the whole bed, making over him the sign of the cross. Instantly he became calm, the sweet smile returned to his face, and he was no more troubled to the very end.

The next morning, the 23rd of May, 1764, at nine o'clock in the morning, while they were reciting the prayers for those in their last agony, the heart of this great servant of God ceased to beat. John Baptist was sixty-six years, three months, and one day old.

A poor old priest, stripped of all worldly possessions, had then died, whose whole life had been devoted to the care of the lowest and most abandoned of God's creatures. He had voluntarily chosen them in preference to the rich and powerful. He had refused all human dignities, and had separated himself altogether from the world. His death, one would think, would pass by without any earthly notice; men would soon forget him, and God alone would reward His brave and faithful servant.

This fate, however, which, humanly speaking, was only natural and to be expected, did not enter into the designs of Divine Providence. God wished to set him before priests for ever as a model, and as a proof to the whole world of what a man can do, denuded of everything, but leaning on God, and corresponding in all things with His grace.

The news of his death spread quickly through the town, and caused an incredible sensation. An immense crowd of people flocked to the Trinità dei Pellegrini, and implored to see his body. His precious remains were consequently exposed in the inner chapel of the hospital. The poor especially surrounded the bier, kissing his feet, touching his body with their rosaries and medals, and crying and

weeping for the loss of one who had been indeed their father. They insisted upon having fragments of his dress, of his hair, of anything, in fact, which belonged to him, and the priests had to watch lest everything should be carried off which he had ever touched.

We have said that he had begged to have a pauper's funeral, for which he had left the money, but in this his desires were not fulfilled. His friends determined to bury him in the church of the Trinità, and all the neighbouring parish priests concurred in paying the utmost veneration to the remains of one whom the whole town recognized as a saint. According to Roman custom the translation took place in the evening. Two hundred and fifty members of the Trinità dei Pellegrini, dressed in their habits, and carrying torches, followed; then upwards of sixty surpliced priests. Many more wished to have joined them, but there were not enough cottas in the church. They walked two and two, absorbed in grief, and thinking of the great loss which the Roman clergy had sustained. Prelates and canons, parish priests and curates, all were mixed together. Round the bier, bearing torches, were the poor of St. Galla, to the number of four hundred, most of them crying bitterly. This funeral procession passed through a number of streets in the city, all traffic being stopped, the crowd kneeling on both sides, and many openly pleading for his intercession in heaven.

The next morning the solemn funeral service was held in the church, which was entirely hung with black, the body, still exposed, being placed on a magnificent bier. According to the register still kept in the church, one hundred and fifty Masses were celebrated that morning.



Monsignor Giovanni Lescari, Archbishop of Adrianopolis, sang the High Mass, and the Archbishop of Genoa and a multitude of other prelates assisted at the Holy Sacrifice.

All this time the crowd succeeded one another by the bier; it seemed as if they could not gaze long enough on the features of their father and the "apostle of Rome." Among many miracles, one of a crippled child, whose mother had lifted it up to touch the body, is attested in the process of his canonization.

At two o'clock in the afternoon it was necessary to close the church, and to do so force was required, so incessant was the influx of visitors. The moment was come to bury the venerable remains of one whom the Church, rather more than a hundred years after, was to reckon among the saints. The priests remained alone, but the same scene was renewed, for all wanted to have a fragment of his clothes. They hastened to place him in a coffin of cypress wood, which was sealed with the arms of the arch-confraternity, and placed in a second coffin, bearing on a leaden plate the following inscription:

"To the glory of God. John Baptist de Rossi, Priest of the Diocese of Genoa, and Canon of St. Mary in Cosmedin, died 23rd May, 1764."

D. O. M.

JO. BAPTISTA DE RUBEIS,

SACERDOS JANUEN,

E. S. M. IN COSMEDIN

CANONICUS;

OBIT DIE XXIII. MAII,

MDCCLXIV.

It was easy to foresee that these precious remains would be exhumed later, and the most minute precautions were taken to distinguish them. The body was placed under a marble slab on the Gospel side of the altar dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. On this slab was also engraved the words, "*Ossa Joannis Baptistæ de Rubeis.*" The canons of St. Mary in Cosmedin, proud of being able to reckon such a man among their ranks, wished to celebrate a solemn service in the church of the Trinità. They came in a body, and did all they could to make the ceremony worthy of its object.

The poor of St. Galla also insisted on a funeral service being celebrated in their chapel, at which many cardinals assisted. John Mary Toietti, John Baptist's intimate friend, pronounced the funeral oration. He had been so closely united to the holy canon that the effort to speak even of his extraordinary virtues was very great, and soon both the preacher and his hearers melted into tears, and sobbed out loud, nor could they reconcile themselves to their irreparable loss, save with the thought of his certain glory in heaven.

This great servant of God was scarcely buried before the witnesses of his holy life and death began to prepare the necessary papers for the cause of his beatification. The numberless miracles which attested his sanctity and his powerful intercession with God contributed in no small degree to second the efforts of his friends. A recital of these prodigies would make this little volume exceed its limits. Suffice it to say that the suit was begun under Pius VI. on the 27th June, 1781, but the state of Europe during the succeeding years put a stop to any progress in

the cause, until it was resumed under Pius IX., when the decree of his beatification was published on the 7th of March, 1859. Finally, on the 8th of December, 1881, the Sovereign Pontiff, Leo XIII., solemnly placed Canon de Rossi among the number of the saints.

A short time after his death a commemorative slab was placed in the church of the Trinità dei Pellegrini, by the care of the clergy, which is a sort of resumé of our saint's holy life. It runs as follows:

D. O. M.

JOANNI BAPTISTÆ DE RUBEIS,

DOMO VEITURIO PRESBYTERO LIGURI,  
 CANONICO BASILICÆ S. MARIÆ IN COSMEDIN,  
 VERBI DEI PRÆCIPUE IN ERUDIENDIS RUDIBUS  
 ET SACRAMENTI PŒNITENTIÆ MINISTRO  
 INDUSTRIO INDEFESSO INCOMPARABILI;  
 IN DEVIIS AD VIAM SALUTIS REDUCENDIS  
 PERPETUO LABORE ET CURA  
 VIRIBUS CONSUMPTO,  
 IN LABORANTIBUS INOPIA SUBLEVANDIS  
 AD PAUPERIEM REDACTO,  
 VOCATIO IN SORTEM DOMINI AD SANCTE VITANS INSTITUENDAM  
 ET AD CHRISTI FIDELIUM SALUTEM PROCURANDAM,  
 DOCTRINA, HORTATIONE, ET EXEMPLO MAGISTRO ET DUCI,  
 OMNIBUS ORDINIBUS IN URBE PROBATO ACCEPTO  
 SODALI OPTIMO FRATRI BENEMERENTI  
 ECCLESIASTICI URBIS,  
 AD SACRA MINISTERIA AB EO INSTITUTI  
 POST JUSTA RITU SOLEMNI PERSOLUTA  
 NE VIRI CELEBERRIMI MEMORIA INTERCIDERET,  
 ÆRE COLLATO MŒRENTES POSUERUNT.  
 OBIT IN HOC IPSO QUOD DIU INCOLUIT XENODOCHIO,  
 X. KAL. JUNIAS ANN. SAL. MDCCLXIV.  
 VIXIT ANNOS LXVI. M. III. D. I.

By miracles, and by the universal esteem of men, God began to glorify, even in this world, His brave and faithful servant, while He bestowed upon him an imperishable crown, and received him into the glories of His kingdom in heaven.

THE END.

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